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# HIGH LIFE

BY

EDOUARD CADOL.



ST. PAUL,

The Price-McGill Company,

1891.



IN PRESS

ALBANY \*  
STARK'S  
\* REVENGE

BY

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—BY—

✓  
EDOUARD CADOL.

Translated from the French

—BY—

H. O. COOKE.



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THE PRICE-MCGILL PUBLISHING COMPANY,  
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# HIGH LIFE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE EVE OF BETROTHAL.

Who does not know Arles, knows nothing!

Some will say: "Allow me! I have been round the world; visited Egypt, India, China and Japan, America, both North and South. I have passed months at Rome, Naples and Venice, and have Paris at my fingers' ends. Wait, I even know the Cannebière!"

"Possibly! but, do you know Arles?"

"No!"

"In that case you know nothing."

It is not so much the arenas, or theatre, or sharp-pointed pavements, or the beautiful women, not to be met with elsewhere. It is that we have there a nobility counting back so far



that one cannot say from whence it sprung. A nobility, and consequently, traditions.

Years have made no change in Arles, revolutions still less; if one may say so all has passed like an angry gust of wind, and in certain families the customs of the "good old times" still remain firm, intact and unchangeable.

This is how it happened, that on a beautiful evening in September, Master Pellapied, notary—the first in Arles, if you please!—perspired from every pore, while reading a diabolical marriage contract, in which the names and quality of the contracting parties, recurring at each paragraph, took up at least eight good lines of text.

It must also be explained, that before beginning, the unfortunate notary, highly honored moreover, had dined at the chateau. A dinner to be remembered, a primitive love feast, where covers were laid for forty guests.

From six until ten o'clock, there had been a continuous stream of dishes. And what dishes! A whole wild boar smothered in garlic sauce, the odor of which clung to one, fol-



lowed by turkeys stuffed with chestnuts and flanked by a haunch of venison with aspic jelly; the whole washed down by wine you could cut with a knife. What else can I recall? It was a feast for a *gourmand*, at the recollection of which the notary still smacked his lips.

Master Pellapied experienced some difficulty in articulating distinctly. His tongue was unmanageable, and the clearness of his sight interfered with by a wretched fly which, dazzled by the light or the grandeur of the surroundings, went far to distract him. In truth, his audience were not in a state to be hypercritical, as from first to the last, the future bride excepted, they had worshipped too freely at the shrine of Bacchus.

The master of the house, that is to say, the Vidame Godefroid de Bicheterre, mounted on a sort of canopied throne, moved about uneasily as if the seat had been stuffed with thorns.

A fat, short-necked, red-faced, good-natured looking man, he made superhuman efforts to support the position becoming to a lord of the manor, and of such ancient lineage.

Next to him was placed his sister, the Can-



oness Stéphanie, who dutifully pinched him on the calf of the leg, when he showed symptoms of falling asleep. The remainder of the guests, all cousins of different degrees, displayed more or less self-respect and sense of decorum, but there were some who, in the happiness of their hearts, snored as if they were at vespers. Meanwhile, our scrivener continued reading.

“In right of which, we Master Pellapied, Notary, as written above, declare that there is forthcoming to us in valuable titles of property, constituting the dowry of the high and noble demoiselle, Charlotte de Bicheterre, chatelaine de Val-Entour, lady high justice of Puits-du-Defonds, Bertignat, the highway and other adjacent places, of which so much in houses, farms and dependencies, ponds, forests of high and low trees, underwood and young shrubs, mills, lime kilns etc., elsewhere detailed, the total is valued at sixteen hundred thousand francs, not including the produce of claims that the said lady Charlotte de Bicheterre, Chatelaine of—

“Et cetera!” muttered a cousin.

“Willingly” replied the Notary.



Then continuing:

"Is reserved expressly for production, from the moment that the lamentable effects of the rebellion of seventeen hundred and eighty-nine, being by the grace of God at an end, the King our Sire regained the kingdom of his father's."

"So let it be," let fall the Vidame. The sound of his voice suddenly breaking in upon the monotony of the reading, some of the cousins opened their eyes, and seemed desirous of changing their position.

"One moment" exclaimed the Notary, "it is not finished."

And to their general consternation he turned the leaf.

"Moreover," continued he wiping his forehead, "we, Master Pellapied, notary, as above written, declare having received, handled and counted the sum of four hundred thousand francs, in current coin of the realm, full weight and good money, which constitutes the inheritance of "Joseph, Marie, Théobald, Arthur, high and powerful baron of Fandansec, eldest son of the defunct...."



"Et cetera!" murmured the cousin, once more.

"Certainly,—and of the defunct," repeated the notary.

"Et cetera, et cetera!"

"Born Marchioness of Pont-Houland, Chatelaine."

"As above," said the Vidame, who could no longer restrain himself.

"Ah! yes, yes, as above, notary!" exclaimed the crowd of relations.

The good man asked for nothing better, and not without reason, for his throat was parched and his soul hankered after one more draught of the Vidame's wine. "In that case there is nothing to do but sign," said he.

A sigh of relief escaped from them all. Their faces bright and evidently hopeful that their enforced duty as listeners was at an end, they left their seats, separated into different groups, glad of an opportunity to stretch their limbs, and keeping up conversation by fits and starts.

During this time the notary and his clerk prepared the pens. When all was in order:

"The "bride elect," said Master Pellapied,



upon which a young girl, small, dainty, amiable and smiling, came forward, saying:

“Here I am.”

But the Vidame, stumbling down from his high seat, hurried forward frowning.

“Gently, my daughter,” said he, in a lofty tone.

The young girl stopped short, blushing to the roots of her luxuriant dark hair. Heavens! how lovely she looked then! There was an indefinable charm in her shy confusion. She did not lower her eyes; no, she opened them wide, amusingly astonished, as if to ask: What harm can I have done? Nothing beyond doubt. Her readiness in coming forward, ought not to have displeased her parents, far from it, for at one time they had feared that she was not kindly disposed towards this marriage, from which the family derived so much advantage. But the young girl had forgotten the famous family traditions, and the Vidame would have preferred being cut into pieces, rather than she should be guilty of such a solecism.

The beautiful little Charlotte, who on a



glance from the Canoness had resumed her seat, understood all this when she saw her father making frantic efforts to reach her.

Let them sign, so far well; but it must be with all due ceremony. And the Vidame advancing, not without staggering, to such an extent as to make the Canoness wonder inwardly if he could be practicing a step, took his daughter's hand and led her to the table.

She took the pen and with a firm, steady hand, quickly signed her name, not omitting a final flourish, clear and strongly defined, which seemed to say: I wish it, and it pleases me!

After which, returning the pen to the notary, she threw a bright glance towards the corner of the room where he, to whom by this stroke of the pen she bound herself so readily, was seated. Truly, in all conscience, he did not merit the happy fate promised him by the little beauty. What an odd looking bridegroom! What an extraordinary get-up for such an occasion!

Dressed up in old-fashioned clothes, clad in garments fit for a bailiff's clerk, his hair unbrushed, wearing a tie opposed to all the



canons of good taste, the expression on his pale, wan face was one of premature dissipation.

It was not that his features were bad. On the contrary. He was even distinguished looking. His blue eyes were not without a certain charm, and altogether, under favorable circumstances, he might have been considered prepossessing.

But what a forbidding countenance at this moment! His look was uncertain and wandering, dull and careworn. One would suppose that instead of a marriage, he was assisting at the funeral of all belonging to him, for at times tears glistened in his eyes, and his whole being seemed to express an insurmountable feeling of desolation. No danger of his even glancing in the direction of little Charlotte! When by chance his eyes did encounter those of his betrothed, he turned his head aside immediately, and his gloom redoubled.

For this there were two reasons: to begin with, this was the first time in his life of twenty-two years, that he had been present at such an entertainment; and forsooth, he



found himself decidedly tipsy, from the beginning of the second course.

Very carefully brought up at the seminary, he had, when his studies were completed, been confided to the care of a trustworthy tutor, with whom it was arranged that he should travel, in order to refine his manners, and give him some knowledge of the world.

The tutor fulfilled his duties conscientiously. He was a sedate Abbé, dry as a piece of parchment, angular and rigid, but learned to a remarkable degree. No possible means of talking on ordinary topics with him; his conversation meant a lesson on every subject.

He had taken his pupil through Italy, Spain and Flanders, and as he had good introductions to the clerical world, the travelers never went to a hotel. They always found either a convent, seminary or private house, where they were hospitably received. Thus the young man had never been exposed to the influence of a bad example, and nothing had happened to prevent him deriving profitable information from all he had seen and heard. And certainly they had shown him curious



sights! To begin with, some Chartreusian monasteries, chapels and hermitages! Ah! He was well guarded now. The Abbé had neglected nothing, They had the worth of their money.

Yet, how singular youth is! Arthur was not satisfied. Doubtless he had not yet seen enough of religious houses! Yes indeed, more than enough; too much to please him! But the things of the profane world, the world that his soul hankered after, that was what he was greedy to know, and that thoroughly-

The second reason for his lack of enthusiasm in regard to his marriage with the little Charlotte arose from that. He had nothing to say against her. He had known her from childhood; she had played with him and was his cousin, four times removed. He thought her even pretty, amiable very attractive. But that was all: "very amiable;" that is to say, rather insipid, and common-place; a little missyish, he repeated to himself in secret,—where my good Abbé had he learned it?—and altogether wanting in good form! Then this marriage was almost a continuation of the



same existence he had been leading; an existence with which he was surfeited. It was all arranged: contract to be signed this evening; this night, the traditional observance of the eve of betrothal; to-morrow, marriage at the church, and then, the usual weary routine under the eye of the Vidame, Charlotte's father, and Arthur's tutor, in company with the Canoness Stéphanie; the whole enlivened by the binding ceremonial. Put yourself in his place. Would the little Charlotte have appeared so desirable under such circumstances?

What he pined for, it must be confessed, was nothing more nor less than "high life;" above all, not less! "High life," with all its allurements.

And what then?

Ah, well! Women; gay, fashionable women; women who drove in carriages, wearing rich laces, and using delicate perfumes. Women who shook hands English fashion; who held receptions, were amusing and clever; who were to be met with at watering places, like Etretat, and Trouville; who played roulette; women and adventures; romance, caprice and



fancy; races, the Bois, perfumed notes, champagne suppers, truffles... "High life," in fact. You know the rest!

Ah! the scamp! The damned young rogue! If the Vidame had only known this! It makes one shiver to think what might have been the consequences. Arthur, was in a state of constant terror, having a holy horror at the bare idea of such a catastrophe. And what about the Abbé? Ah! the poor Abbé! Look at his beard, his nose, what a grievous deception to practice on a worthy priest, who had watched over the young rascal confided to his care, jealously guarding him from all that was not austere and edifying!

But, how the deuce did this infernal young fool get his head full of such ideas? By what means had a mind naturally pure become impregnated with such vivid imaginings? By what devilish process had he been able to steal glimpses of the realities of a certain pernicious existence, the charms of which presented themselves so attractively to his mind?

Don't try to discover! I will tell you, between ourselves. Arthur, so strictly chape-



roned, had managed to read; to devour bad books, or more correctly, books which were dangerous—novels. If he had come across Balzac, or Sand, Hugo, nay, even Zola, it might not have mattered much; but, far worse works of perdition, productions where the charms of real life appeared enchanting, descriptions so exact as to defy dispute; photographs of the great world, such as it is, had fallen into his hands. And by whom? The illustrious Arsène Houssaye!

Yes! he had read him secretly, at night, by the insufficient light of a candle, straining nerves already over excited. Thanks to this teacher, he knew society; he knew women, and aspired with all the strength of his heart and soul, to live this life, to mingle with these beautiful duchesses, with such faultless style, so distinguished and fascinating.

To be of their day, to have a name and fortune to admit of his knowing them, to mingle with or be connected ever so slightly with them, had been his dream; and now to find himself constrained to pass the rest of his life in this hole of a place; dried up, taciturn, he-



hind the times, a confirmed grumbler; wedded to a young girl, very amiable no doubt, engaging, pretty, but terribly, "bread and butterish," in one word provincial!—Oh! what a hard fate! Yet again, put yourself in the place of this young man, what would you have done, when the notary called upon you to sign your name to the contract, the contract which consigned you to this dreary fate, and bound you irrevocably to this little *bourgeoise*? Yes, *bourgeoise* in spite of her aristocratic descent.

He got up suddenly, anger in his heart, and despair in his soul, kept down only by the fear of getting himself into trouble with his guardian, and deciding, with that feeling of desperation which one experiences when tired of life, and sees no other remedy than suicide, he went up to the table. He was so unsteady that one of the good cousins had enough to do to support him. He saw thirty-six candles; innumerable stars dazzled him, to such an extent, that he dipped his pen three times in the notary's glass of brandy, mistaking it for the inkstand.



But at last he succeeded. The deed was done!

Was he led back to his place? Did he find his way back alone, or did he fall down half way? To this day he has never been able to discover. Oppressed, overwhelmed, stunned, it seemed to him as if the ground gave way under his feet, and at that moment, he would have gladly given his four-hundred—beautiful, the notary had called them—thousand francs for an iced lemonade.

That effort over, the unlucky youth thought himself free. But not yet, however. An alarming uproar awoke him from his state of stupor.

“What is that?” demanded the Canoness.

“Our faithful tenants and vassals,” replied the Vidame severely. “I have had a barrel of wine tapped for them, and they are coming, as is fitting, to pay allegiance to him who is henceforth to bear the double escutcheon of Bicheterre and Fandansec.”

Upon which, setting the example, he forced himself to stand upright.

“Try and steady yourselves a little,” said



he to the cousin's, whom a lingering sense of propriety alone prevented from holding onto the wall.

Already they heard from outside the discordant yelling of a semi-intoxicated crowd, shouting out a hideous chorus with the full strength of their lungs. Charlotte regarded her betrothed husband with a smile from which all trace of merriment had vanished. In her heart, she harbored a feeling of pity for this ingenuous youth.

"They have made him drink too much" said she mentally; "he will be ill perhaps. The poor, dear fellow!"

Remembering, also, that in obedience to the family tradition, this being the betrothal eve, he had to pass the night alone in this hall, she felt uneasy when reflecting on the discomfort he would certainly experience. However, her own apartment was quite near; she had a small spirit lamp there, and nothing could be easier than to prepare, should the worst come to the worst, a soothing drink. She thought of this and it re-assured her, remembering that she might regard Arthur as already her hus-



band, and that in spite of all traditions in the world, she could, if necessary, without any breach of decorum, pass him by the half-opened door a glass of lemonade and a big lump of sugar.

Hardly had she arrived at this conclusion, when the "tenants and vassals" crowded into the room, and began cheering with hoarse but enthusiastic voices. For a quarter of an hour, the tumult reigned supreme. The police, attracted by the cheers, appeared on the scene; but happily, as the evening was far advanced, the crowd prudently beat a retreat.

At the last moment, the Vidame, supported on either side by the elder members of the family, undertook to make a speech; he started well, but like a celebrated statesman, becoming "intoxicated with the exuberance of his own verbosity" he suddenly lost the thread of his discourse, floundered about helplessly, and finally came to a dead stop, panting. After all, what did it matter? They understood each other; understood above all, that the entertainment was at an end for that day, and they were at liberty to retire; that was



the principal thing and so they applauded vociferously.

Arthur would willingly have followed their example, that is, gone to his room and taken refuge in bed. But over and above were these ever-lasting traditions! And to conform to them, he had to pass the night in the halls of his ancestors; devoting this, his betrothal eve, to serious thoughts, self-examination, and prayer!

Meanwhile, he had not even the energy to inveigh against this antiquated custom; his whole being was weighed down by a feeling of oppression, and he vaguely felt, that on the whole, his ambition went no further than the possession of a small sofa, on which he could undisturbed, await the end of this hard day's work.

He hardly noticed the departure of the guests. The noisy singing of the merry-makers could still be heard in the distance. The same vassals who, gorged to the eyes, disputed loudly on regaining the village. But within the chateau, the silence was complete, not a sound was to be heard.



Without more ceremony, the young man undid the buttons of his vest, loosened his shirt collar, and sank into the depths of an arm-chair, that stood invitingly near. He had anticipated falling asleep at once, but presently a prickly sensation in his legs disturbed him, and then the light was annoying. He hesitated a long time before summoning courage to rouse himself, but at last arose, and mounting a chair extinguished the lamp.

Finding himself suddenly in darkness, he was confused, and felt uncertain as to the whereabouts of his resting place; but becoming more accustomed to the obscurity, he began to distinguish different objects, with a clearness all the more remarkable, as they seemed to present a most singular aspect. The light of the moon brought out some parts of the room in strong relief, leaving the corners and ceiling in partial shadow, which strongly appealed to the imagination. Turning his gaze to the window, the landscape lay before him deserted, still, strange, with outlines strongly defined by the cold light of the stars. All was wan and pale as death. One would say a pic-



ture in black and white, without any *mezzo* tints; and far away a light, one solitary red glare, the disc of a railway lamp. Had he not been the victim of a racking headache, the scene would have possessed a certain attraction for him; but the quick, painful throbbing of his temples was more than he could endure, so with a sinking feeling at his heart, he turned and regained the sofa, propping himself up among the cushions as well as he could.

Then, all that had transpired during this eventful day began to present themselves with more distinctness. He pictured himself at the table, seated in front of the wild boar, again listening to the toasts, compliments, ovations; and finally the shrill monologue of the long suffering notary.

He shivered at the bare memory of it. What was it that he had read, this scrivener of the devil? A marriage contract; his.... Was it then really true? Was it not a dream, a hallucination? No, there was his signature. He, Arthur had signed this contract.... Had he indeed signed it? He opened his eyes, and threw an inquiring glance at the table. The inkstand



was still there with some half dozen pens; but the contract? That damned Pellapied had carried it off and put it carefully under lock and key at Arles.

Ah, that contract! What a terrible revelation it had been to this young man! Brought up as has been described; passive by nature, and besides, subjected to the tyranny of his guardian the Vidame, the Canoness, and the learned but strict Abbé, his tutor, who had taken him on such an agreeable and instructive tour, Arthur had never dared to inquire into the monetary state of his affairs; whether his parents had left him much, or nothing. So that this thirst for "High Life" which had siezed him on reading the works of Arsène Houssaye, was to him an ideal state, greedily desired, but altogether unattainable.

And now this notary, this Master Pellapied, this legal functionary, had suddenly informed him that he was the legitimate possessor of "four hundred thousand beautiful francs, in current coin of the realm, etc,;" that he the said notary, "had counted and tested their weight!" But, then?



"Yes, let me think a moment: but then?.... Let me take a careful view of things. 'High Life' after all is not such an Utopian idea, so impossible of realization! What else had been said?"

Of all that had taken place during this eventful day, this was what impressed him most. And he felt a savage desire to spring from his couch, rush to Master Pellapied's office, and without any formality, say to him:

"I am of age, so hand me over my property 'in hard money and full weight.'"

"But"....

"No buts at all! I want my money, or a summons and gallows await you!"

He pictured himself, imperious and angry, standing over the helpless notary, who thoroughly vanquished, would, without further parley, open his strong box, take from it a bag, and count out coin after coin, piling them up in fantastic heaps. A sudden slip and the glittering mass would fall down on the floor in cascaded of burnished gold. What joy! What triumph!

Suddenly the brilliant vision faded, and



Arthur again buried his head in the cushions, humiliated, discomfited, and cried like an angry, frightened schoolboy.

“Ah! well!” addressing himself with an accent of profound self-contempt, “are you incapable of daring anything, you pitiful ass? You are too much in awe of your guardian, the Canoness, and the Abbé. They will marry you and you will not have the pluck to whisper an objection! You will accept your cousin Charlotte as your wife. She is no doubt pretty, amiable, but missyish and very silly; and you, trembling under their glance, signed the contract. Cowardly contemptible cur!”

“Ah, it was a deed worthy of you, poor imbecile, with no will of your own, helpless tool in the hands of those who have reduced you to the position of a mere nonentity; I repeat it, it was worthy of you! Go! get married, you mean hound; accept your fate; bury yourself alive in this wretched hole; bend your neck under the yoke of those traditions at which you pretend to sneer; cut your own throat, miserable snipe; lick the hand that strikes you. Ah! snivelling fool! ——”



Then seeing again, in imagination, the fiery disc of the railway lamp shine out from the surrounding darkness like a ray of hope, like the light "Hop of my Thumb" saw from the top of the tree, he heaved a sigh, saying mentally:

"It could be easily managed. The door is open, the moat nearly filled up, and the road sure. In twenty minutes, at a good steady run, which would help me to digest the garlic sauce and leathery flesh of that wretched boar,—heavens, how heavy it rests!—I would arrive without any difficulty at the station. The express train passes at eighteen minutes past midnight, and tomorrow morning I would be in Paris. Once there, my room taken at the hotel, I would only have to refresh myself with a bath, hasten to an attorney, authorize him to demand from Master Pellapied my inheritance. What could be more simple?"

The poor devil trembled with joy; he pictured the results, and the future dawned before him bright, sparkling, radiant, unheard of; the dawn of "High Life!"

Ah! yes, but....



"But, you dare not," he repeated to himself, this time with a touch of angry indignation. "You are afraid. You are the most miserable hound I ever came across in my life! Get along! You have lost your last chance in life. Close your eyes as one does when diving, resign yourself to a provincial life, full of mild platitudes and stupid traditions; in one word: humdrum!" Upon which he shed maudlin tears of regret.

"And all this," he said to himself a moment later, "for what or for whom?"

His eyes were as yet only half opened; he sat up and regarded the portraits of his ancestors, which covered the walls of the room even to the ceiling. Such a sacrifice for this pack of old fools, one more ugly than the other, and who, perhaps, were not his ancestors at all!

At this sacrilegious doubt, which would have caused his tutor, the learned and worthy Abbé, to shudder, the air seemed to vibrate with strange murmurings. All these worthies of both sexes, appeared to have their mouths open, their eyes rolling, amazed, scandalized, threatening.



Arthur, frozen to the very marrow of his bones, fell back speechless with horror among the cushions of the sofa, half believing they had hold of him by his feet; and hearing strange maledictions in the air, his heart again failed him, and he once more abandoned himself to helpless tears, completely overcome.

“Let it go,” said he to himself, giving up all hope. “Fate has decided; nothing can save me. Let me sleep and learn to resign myself; I have not the temperament to resist. Oh! how thirsty I am! How that garlic sauce burns my throat! I would give every one of my beautiful four hundred thousand francs for one glass of cold water.”

To be anxious to sleep, is often the surest means of keeping yourself awake. Scarcely had he begun to feel drowsy, when he would start up with a bound that threatened to land him on the floor.

Little by little, there seemed to come to his ear a distinct strain. It was music, as if sung by a choir of supernatural voices. The sound gradually became louder, more distinct, and he heard:



“Away with timidity!  
Come to the town!  
And still thine alarms  
With a taste of its charms;  
For the ‘High Life’ astounding  
There is ever abounding.  
So let us away  
To the ladies of Arsène Houssaye—  
Come!”

Then, down there, a shrill sound of the station master’s horn, announced the arrival of the train; the tinkling of a bell called the workmen to the station, and one of them repeated in a severe but whimsical accent:

“Travellers for Paris cross the track; show your ticket.

Then again the mysterious chorus recommenced:

“Your presence awaiting,  
They stand at the skating.  
At the stalls there’s a place,  
There to bet on the race.  
On the Mirliton scroll  
They your name will enroll,  
While the ‘High Life’ you learn  
Causes temples to burn.  
So let us away  
To the ladies of Arsène Houssaye—  
Come!”

This was too much! His courage rose, and



excited almost to delirium he started up, re-buttoned his vest, arranged his collar, and looked around for a hat, his own or anybody else's,—it did not matter which,—he would even go without, if necessary.

But, oh horror! Oh miracle! a veritable intervention of Providence!

As he raised his eyes in the direction, where he might hope to find the object of his search, he stopped transfixed with horror. The ancestors had come half-way out of their frames, and shook their armour, holding towards him entreating arms, clothed in their coats of mail, and shedding burning tears through the opening of their visors.

They also gave voice to their sentiments in song, and although their visors imparted a cracked tone to their voices, Arthur was not the less impressed by their eloquence.

They said,—thirdly:

“Don't go there!

For in its trend

Is grief and sorrow without end.”

There was without doubt, a few feet too many in the last verse; but we must make



allowance for the emotion which stirred these defunct heroes. But the young man did not hesitate. Had he observed them? No one knows.

One thing is certain. He found himself tearing through the country breathless, dazed, his hair streaming in the wind. He moved along like a phantom, going straight ahead, clearing fences and ditches, getting over walls as if by magic, at such a rate that he arrived at the station—his wished for destination—just at the moment when the signal was given for departure. He had a terrible struggle with the authorities who, according to rule, insisted on his waiting for the next train.

But escaping them, he opened the door of a first-class carriage. From the station master to the porter, all hung on to the skirts of his coat, exclaiming, calling out to the guard, and swearing by the Gods he should not go.

Unfortunately for them, the Gods, perhaps being taken unawares, turned a deaf ear to their prayers. The cloth gave way in their hands, a whistle grated harshly on the ears of the grinning crowd, and while they struggled



together on the ground, a confused heap of arms and legs, the train went off, like an arrow "shot from the bow by an unerring hand."

When the half hour after midnight struck, a door in the ancestral hall was gently opened and a small rosy face, muffled up in a white bordered cap, which imprisoned the masses of silken hair, half revealed itself.

It was Charlotte. Closely enveloped in a grey woolen dressing gown, she held a cup and saucer in her hand, on which rested a silver spoon that rattled at every throb of her heart. The darkness prevented her seeing anything, she listened;—not a sound.

"He is asleep," said she to herself; "so much the better. Poor fellow!" and she disappeared.

Returning to her own room, Charlotte drew an arm-chair near the door and seated herself, determined to sleep with one eye open, and to listen, saying again softly:

"Poor fellow!"....



## CHAPTER II.

### THE FOREIGN COLONY.

Near the upper end of the Boulevard Haussmann, in that picturesque and shady corner formerly known as the Beaujon Quarter, stands a small hotel, surrounded by gardens, which shelter it on the right from a boarding-house—a favorite resorts for Americans, affording a fertile soil for flirtations—on the left, by a chocolate colored edifice, with raised terraces, adorned with statues, almost as open to ridicule as he who was capable of designing such a grotesque building.

The facade was in freestone, hacked up into garlands and masks of delicate design. A sort of winter garden, thickly planted with foreign exotics, formed a companion on the one side to a billiard room, improvised too late, on the other.

At the windows hung curtains of hand-made



lace, lined with tinted silk, which displayed to advantage the fantastic variety of the stitch.

On the street—la Rue Balzac—two pavilions took from the width of the principal entrance; the stables faced the back of the house.

The establishment consisted of a porter and his family, two footmen, a *valet de chambre*, a *chef* and his assistant, the butler, a coachman and stable boy. A sewing woman, with her own servant, two chamber maids, and a general servant, formed the female department. And in order to keep up to the standard of correct style, a groom!

Everything else was in keeping; and, when the carriages were ordered out, people sought their balconies for a breath of fresh air.

In short, a delightful home, surrounded with every luxury which wealth could command.

The mistress of this charming retreat was what is designated in these days a “star;” the star of the foreign colony, the beautiful Mme. d’Aldaïa; better still, the Countess d’Aldaïa, a South American, speaking with a slight Portuguese accent. She was sufficiently a blonde to be forgiven for not being a



brunette—the one true color!—her hair was the shade of over-ripe grain; of a pale dull tint, having a charming effect. Her eyes were dreamy, unfathomable, with a most singular blending of exquisite delicacy, not of the texture of satin, but of taffeta, fine enough to have been woven by the Gods.

Her small aquiline nose and rose tinted nostrils, her mouth, ears, neck, shoulders, figure, all combined to form an entrancing picture; one to gaze upon through all time, to worship as before a shrine!

Assuredly, beauty is a matter of taste, and each person has his own idea; but there could be but one opinion about this woman. She was so pretty, and at the same time so beautiful—two words which convey a very different meaning—that one involuntarily paid homage at first sight.

And homage, combined with respect, so royally did she carry herself amidst her magnificent surroundings.

Her power embraced even her own immediate circle, or rather her husband's, for she entered into none of those small intimate friend-



ships, which are so often tolerated by the society of today, in spite of the opportunities for slander which they afford.

A strange man, her husband! Above six feet in height, with hands large enough to fell an ox, but well formed in spite of that; square cut figure, solid and majestic. His dark eyes, wavy black hair and beard, added to his olive tinted complexion, betrayed his nationality.

“A Brazilian!” was the general remark.

He was indeed a native of that distant country, though it was not an easy matter to determine his exact standing. For all that, in the absence of a birth register, he held papers, which proved him beyond doubt, the Count d’Aldaïa.

In addition, one had to exercise a certain amount of prudence in addressing him, for at times you would surprise a sudden light in his eyes, betraying the fact that he was not a man to be trifled with. This look, accompanied by an almost imperceptible clenching of the teeth, which he gave way to on the slightest provocation, acted as a chill on any attempt at pleasantry. During his youth, he had had



to display uncommon energy, and if he occupied a high rank in the world and maintained a princely retinue, he owed it to his own exertions, or at least, to the courage and strength of character, which enabled him to make others toil, so that he might profit.

An indefatigable traveler, at one time a trapper, then a corsair, and on occasion a freebooter, he had seen life in all its phases, and had more than a hundred times staked his life freely on the side it suited his interests to espouse.

Finally, he had been a Charlemagne in his own country, and although frequently acting in opposition to the reigning powers, was held in general esteem, even by his most bitter opponents. Many rulers on the African coast even went the length of regretting that he had abandoned the traffic in slaves, such a grateful recollection did they retain of his commercial transactions with them. But what could he do? There was a limit to all things, and finding himself one day the owner of a mine yielding enormous quantities



of gold, he thought that after such a hard life, he was entitled to a little well-earned repose.

It was with this intention, that he crossed over to Europe, where in spite of the notoriety attaching to him in other lands, his name was unknown. The recipient of a princely income, he travelled all over Europe, but, whatever the attractions other capitols might possess for him, Paris alone was the one spot where he felt tempted to fix his penates.

It is possible the Countess had something to do with this; but we cannot affirm it. Any way, they at once took a high stand in society, making their house the center for all the leaders of fashion, and when they received at their hotel, reporters were kept busy and the papers were filled with laudatory praises of the charming Countes d'Aldaïa.

One winter evening, they had a few friends to dinner, people of undoubted position.

To begin with, the Baroness d'Iosk, a woman still young, but at the same time fully matured, and with irreproachable manners.

Her husband follows. For him the word *still* would be out of place; at the most, he



might be twenty-five years old, but he did not look it. His beardless face bore the appearance of extreme youth, although his heavy bass voice proved that, within this juvenile frame, there was a man!

The lady came from Toulouse, where her parents had kept an ale house, largely patronized by officers of the army. The baron was a native of Edinburgh.

How did it happen that these two, born at such a distant date and so far from each other, had appeared before the mayor of one of the *arrondissement* of Paris? Different conclusions were arrived at, not any of them savoring too much of Christian charity. What did it matter? The fact was there, certain, unanswerable. No two people existing could boast of being more married than they were, and both gave one the impression of regretting this melancholy fact.

Accompanying this party, was a personage of great importance: the Prince Swenska, a real prince, born somewhere in Finland, and almost a sovereign. One cannot exactly say in



what duchy, but somewhere under the political influence of the Czar.

Tall, thin and dry as the timber of his own country, he carried, on a neck of immoderate length, a small straw colored head adorned with hair so exactly of the same negative tint, that he presented the appearance of being entirely bald. Happily his eyebrows and lashes were white, which permitted their being seen, and, starting out of this bleak foreground, were two small black eyes, giving a most sinister effect to the whole countenance.

In addition, but occupying a secondary place in the opinion of their hosts, was a Wallachian major, who, when he spoke, gave one the impression of having swallowed a drum; a soft flabby personage, clinging as a limpet, and exasperating enough to bring tears to one's eyes. He was literary in his tastes, wrote articles for magazines consecrated to the emancipation of the Israelites in the East; called himself professor of Magyar and Chinese; an unintelligible interpreter of the different Japanese embassies; and lately married to the wealthy widow of a manufacturer of paint for



dramatic artists, which article he dispensed not too lavishly among the upper ten.

Then came a few hangers-on, young men of no particular standing, occupying the same position in society, which on the stage is described as "guests."

Giving the accustomed signal to the Baroness, the Countess arose from the table, on which these last named personages showed a tendency to plant their elbows, and retired to a small drawingroom where coffee was served. Casting around her the comprehensive glance of the careful hostess, she lay down on the couch, and burying her little feet under a mass of embroidery, she gave herself up to thought.

To judge from the slight frown, which drew down her exquisitely defined eyebrows, her reflections were tinged with melancholy, enhancing the severe, cold, inexorable style of her beauty.

To see her thus, one would have wished to be master of the world, in order to lay countless treasures at her feet, his crown and himself, for the pleasure of recalling her wonted serenity, and provoking the smile which



brought an indefinable, lovely dimple to her velvety cheek.

Why should she be so pre-occupied? What could have happened to sadden her?

For about four months past, the Count's temper had become uncertain, gloomy and morose, and even his health had become impaired. He, formerly so exact and methodical in his habits, had lately become careless, and neglectful of his appearance. On one occasion the Countess, coming suddenly upon him, had surprised him working busily over accounts, consulting letters and telegrams, marked with the placer stamp, but of which he had never spoken to her.

It was evident that he had received disagreeable news, and of a very serious nature.

It was this which had effected, in so incredibly short a time, such a change in this strange, stern man. In fact, he was no longer recognizable. Hitherto upright and dignified in his appearance, he had now lost that commanding presence which had so distinguished him. His clothes hung loosely on him; his hair had turned gray, and in some places he



was quite bald; his eyes were sunken, with dark brown circles around them; and his cheeks hung down flabbily on his neck, which resembled nothing so much as a package of cord, so clearly discernable were the muscles and nerves.

When he took his place at the table, it was simply to keep up appearances, as he scarcely tasted anything, merely touching with his lips a glass of wine and water, he whose habit it had been formerly to devour with the appetite of a wolf, and gulp down copious draughts of burgundy and champagne.

Then this brilliant traveler, who never tired of relating his own varied experiences, now sat silent, taciturn, lost in thought, for hours together, his eyes fixed on vacancy.

There must be some cause for this. He was passing through some crisis, and appeared the mere shadow of his former self, the faded likeness of the old trapper. Only at times, an unexpected light in his dark eyes would recall the lightning glance which had the power to intimidate whole tribes of refractory or rebellious Indians.



This particular evening, however, he had kept up appearances pretty well, and his conversation was not without a certain amount of vivacity.

They talked politics it is true; and although our affairs did not in any way concern him, who had bartered slaves and brained more than one, on little or no provocation, pillaged and burnt whole villages, he prided himself on being so "honest and moderate" that he would have reduced to nothingness, after the fashion of St. Bartholomew, all those who came under the head of liberal. Ah! by Jove! he was a man of principle!

When they had argued and talked long enough to aid digestion, he gave the signal for a general move to the drawing-room.

Hearing them come, the Countess gave her lovely head a shake, as if to chase away the thoughts which had taken possession of her, and rang for coffee. While the guests partook of it, continuing their discussion, she signed to her maid, who assisted in serving, to draw near.



"Did you see the person who waited here such a long time?" she asked.

"Yes, Madame: the upholsterer."

She hesitated before asking more, but American or French, no woman can conquer the curiosity which was the means of chasing us from our earthly paradise; besides in this case, such great interests being at stake, she overlooked the seeming impropriety and added:

"Wait, one moment, Fulgence."

"Madame?"

"Did the Count see this upholsterer?"

"He was compelled to, in the end, for the man said he would not go away without his money if he had to stay all night."

"Ah! he said that!" repeated the Countess in an astonished tone. "And did he get his money, do you know?"

Fulgence, looking in the opposite direction, and affecting an air of extreme innocence, replied:

"I am not certain, Madame. I only know that the man slammed the door, and cried out to my lord: 'You will hear from me soon!'"



“Impossible! Perhaps, Fulgence, you did not hear distinctly?”

“Ah! yes, Madame, I did; but I thought perhaps the man had been having too much beer. How else could it be explained?”

“That is enough,” said the Countess, anxious to cut short the voluble criticisms of her maid.

But her heart sank, and instinctively she glanced in the direction where her husband stood, talking to the Baroness, at the other end of the room.

She watched him attentively for a long time, and was struck by the ravages a short period had wrought in his appearance, he who was known among the Indians, as the “terror of the Pampas.”

“Could it be true? He who, when roused, people turned away from as from an enraged tiger; he who had faced the wildest tempests; and for mere amusement, had attacked bears in their caves; he to allow this vulgar tradesman, a mere journeyman, to address him insolently and contemptuously!”

It seemed to her as if this was the end of all



things. What could have happened to place him in such a humiliating position?

Sunk deep in thought she did not perceive that the others had left the room, and that she was completely alone.

After taking coffee, the Prince Swenska proposed whist, and they had withdrawn to the card room so that they might smoke while playing.

The Baroness had followed the gentlemen, fearing her husband might forget the late hour, or, worse still, allow himself to be carried off to the club, of which they were all members. She wished him to accompany her to a ball, very generally discussed in the fashionable papers for the last fortnight. The entertainment was given by an old Vice-Admiral, lately returned to France, in honor of his niece, who, until now, had lived in strict seclusion in the country.

Suddenly the footman announced:

“Monsieur de Fandansec.”

At the sound of this name, breaking in so unexpectedly on her reverie, the Countess



could not repress a start, and, with a strangely fixed gaze, she murmured:

‘ He!’

It was indeed he; no other than Arthur; although the same announcement would have been necessary had the Vidame and the Canoness been present; for, never in their lives, would they have been able to recognize him as he appeared now.

He was absolutely transformed. His hair was brushed down in two little bands, à la Capoul, which covered half his forehead; freshly shaved, glass in eye, his face almost hidden by a collar reaching to his ears, and well opened at the throat, he presented the appearance of a donkey looking over a white-washed wall.

Wearing a white tie, black coat, well opened waistcoat and black trousers with silk stripes, widening elegantly at the end, in the form of an elephant’s foot, over boots picked out in Arabian characters, he presented a most extraordinary appearance, in every way calculated to arrest the attention of the passer-by. Indeed this happened frequently, when about



five o'clock, he drove a pair of spirited ponies carefully up the Champs-Élysées. He could not pass without being observed. He wore coats such as no else had; a hat with such a narrow brim that had it not been for the color anyone might have mistaken it for a fez. As for his trousers, he exacted from his tailor that, when made, the rest of the piece should be destroyed.

In addition to these peculiar idiosyncrasies, he affected an accent in the pronunciation of some words which was altogether original. Thus, his "Chère Madame" was metamorphosed into "Chère Medême," followed by a shrug of the shoulders, altogether inimitable. His was the finished type of the man of the world, of the man who knows how to live, of the man who, on arriving at his prime, takes his seat in the legislature, and, as is becoming one of the leaders of the upper ten, helps to elevate the masses.

As for Arthur, he had not arrived there yet, and concerned himself as little about the legislature as he did about his first Coral. A very different anxiety occupied his thoughts. Like



many others, he had fallen a victim to the beautiful Countess, and, dissimulation being, in his opinion, an infamous vice, he declared himself in terms as glowing as they were precise.

What did she think? He could not exactly say. She had smiled, certainly, but a smile open to different interpretations. To avoid any misconception, he had even gone the length of sending her letters, which had not been returned, but to which he had received no answers. His passion had redoubled; he had watched for opportunities for holding private conversations with her, arranging matters so skilfully that on more than one occasion he had been able to secure a tête-à-tête in the midst of a crowded drawing-room, or in the dim recesses of some curtained retreat.

Ah! how uncertain, how hard to understand this Countess was! All his eloquence had only been able to elicit vague answers, a slight shake of the head, which seemed to imply a doubt of the sincerity of his protestations, interjections uttered at random, at the most, a furtive pressure of the hand; no encourage-



ment in this mere trifling, the little triflings of a platonic flirtation.

And yet he spared no pains! He entertained her with all the gossip commonly reported about the Count, laying before her how unfortunate she was in being condemned to such unworthy companionship; boldly affirming, that for the honor of her sex, she ought not to allow it to be supposed that his society could possess any attractions for her, either one way or another.

But his labor was thrown away, she said neither yes nor no, and Arthur though irritated, would return to the charge again and again, with the obstinacy of an ignorant fool. Sometimes she would say to him, heaving a deep sigh:

“Do you know who I am? Am I worthy the affection of such a high-souled being as you?”

This he attributed to mere coquetry, except at times, when falling into the snare, he would undertake to prove, that she hardly did herself justice, and carried away by the warmth of the debate, he would call her—and



without any authority from her—by her Christian name: Inez!

How scandalized she was the first time! It was most evident she was a pure-minded and religious woman! But what was to be done? He was too deeply enamored to perceive the lady's indifference, so much so, that at last, tired of wasting her indignation to no purpose, she allowed him to talk, and not to be too disobliging, mingled some "Arthurs" with her replies!

In short they had arrived at that psychological point, recognized as "Platonism"—namely that perfect union of souls and mutual asperation towards a "better-world"—in fact every possible romantic quibble, prevailed in their friendly intercourse. At the most, during these chaste effusions, which were altogether free from mere material vulgarity, would she allow herself to indulge in a sneer at her husband, and not less, at the institutions of an artificial society, which refuses harshly to women, many indulgences of a high order, and unquestionably legitimate.



Countess d'Aldaia was careful not to commit herself.

Their conversations were simply an intellectual interchange of ideas, mutually flattering, in that a high sense of honor was observed, thus adding enormously to their self-esteem.

Only in the long run, Arthur began to tire of wandering about in these sublime heights, and as any descent to a lower position was impossible in such elevated society, he strove to discover some other honorable means of rescuing the Countess Inez from the bondage of a husband, who undoubtedly wearied her.

About this time, the question of divorce was agitating the philosophical world, and some very excellent views on this subject were published, opinions which had already been aired perhaps, but which none the less appealed strongly to the young man's imagination. He greedily devoured all that was written on the subject, and remained convinced of the urgent necessity there was to modify the existing code touching this law.

For as much, thought he, as it would be unbecoming for Inez to indulge in thoughts of



an unlawful connection, so would it appear honorable in him, to propose a marriage, after a divorce was granted. The dignity of each would thus be satisfied.

But, however eloquent might be the pleading of these philosophers, in favor of the re-establishment of this institution, the legislature did not seem to give it all the attention desirable. Admitting even, that by returning again to the charge, these writers and moralists succeeded in drawing attention to the subject, it was to be feared that in this country, where there was so much routine to be observed, the affair would drag along endlessly, and it can be readily understood that our young Lothario, was not in a mood to wait.

One evening, not knowing exactly what to do, hesitating between going to the club to take a hand at baccarat, or going to his room in order to indite some more burning protestations to Inez—my God! what volumes he had sent her! but in a style, be it understood, extremely proper, though at the same time impassioned—he saw the announcement for that



evening's performance at the Vaudeville. It was a new piece: "Madame Caverlet" by the most celebrated dramatist of the time.

This was not the reason which determined Arthur to secure a place. We know his thoughts were elsewhere. He decided to see this piece merely to pass the time and to divert the current of his thoughts.

But what an agreeable surprise awaited him! At the first interlude he asked himself what hidden inspiration had guided him there, an intervention of his Guardian Angel. He had been brought up at the seminary, and firmly believed in this possibility, to such an extent, that at times it was troublesome to him.

He listened to the entire piece with wrapt attention, so as not to lose a single syllable. Did he appreciate the clear, full and powerful characteristics which distinguished this author? I cannot answer for it. That which he remembered most distinctly was this, that in becoming a proprietor in the Canton of Geneva you could be naturalized; from which follows, that you could obtain this famous di-



voice which these devils of French legislators have so much difficulty in awarding.

Forthwith, the play being ended, he hastened to his club, ordering a footman to bring him at any price the "Advertiser."

At two o'clock in the morning he was still occupied in searching among the advertisements for the sale of some property in this delightful region, so favorable to the indulgence of lawful love.

This accomplished, his plans were soon arranged.

What could be more simple, if Inez really loved him? And why should he doubt it? She would welcome with unmingled delight this project of proposed flight.

One happy morning they would both leave, these two, all alone in a private carriage, engaged beforehand. They would breakfast at Dijon—first class buffet—and eighteen hours later they would register their names at the Hotel des Bergues, at Geneva, or even at the Beau-Rivage, under a false name, so as to mislead any pursuers.

One person alone in Paris would know their



address, a friend of Arthur's, a most worthy friend, a thoroughly good fellow, although with no good looks to recommend him and awkward in his movements. A scampish little government clerk; Anatole Peignard by name, who looked up to Arthur as to a god, dazzling in distinction, intelligence, and superior style. Anatole would keep them posted as to the movements of the Count, and when, with the lapse of time, the world would have forgotten the event, they could attend to all the formalities necessary for the realization of this delightful project! After which, strong in the legality of their bonds, they would return and display their happiness before all Paris, under the eyes of those who, however much they might envy their fate, had not the energy to follow their example.

What a beautiful dream! The delightful intimacy in their future home—such as he had witnessed in the first act of “Madame Caverlet.” And what a charming life they would lead therein—all honor, be it understood—until their union could be legalized and sanctified, their souls transported with the grand specta-



cle of this Lake Lemon—so immortalized by Byron—these everlasting snows which sparkle there, less eternal and less pure than their celestial love!

The first time that Arthur broached the subject to the Countess, she appeared simply surprised. There was no display of either repugnance or pleasure, only an inexplicable look of doubt in her eyes, as she gazed at him inquiringly.

“Are you speaking seriously?” she asked him. “You, Arthur, you would really go so far?”

“It is only an eighteen hours’ ride,” he answered ingenuously.

But here the entrance of a visitor prevented them from discussing the subject any further on that occasion, and since then the beautiful Inez seemed anxious to avoid any return to it.

Arthur, naturally, was discontented, but would not allow himself to feel offended with her. She had evidently some scruples to overcome. He could understand this, and in his heart liked and esteemed her all the better for it.



Yet, in the long run, this idea began to pall on him. He esteemed her, it is true, that was understood; but there must be a solution to this difficulty, and in all honor and loyalty, he would again point out to her the necessity there existed for the immediate adoption of his plan.

Then followed some heart-rending scenes between them. If she did harbor scruples—good heavens! was she altogether without principle, and could he with any decency reproach her, when this was the reason he held her in such high esteem and veneration?

Good God! how embarrassing it all was!

A fortunate circumstance gave our young hero a chance of bringing matters to a crisis, without appearing to despise the conscientious scruples of this lady love.

This young stranger, in whose honor her uncle, the Vice-Admiral was to give a ball, had been indirectly offered to Arthur as a future wife. Out of politeness, and also perhaps a little diplomacy, he agreed to be present at an interview, cleverly arranged by one of the interested parties.



It was agreed that he should be present one evening at the Opera—Comique, when she should be there; Arthur occupying a place in the dress circle, the family of the young lady in a private box. During the first act they had free license to scrutinize each other at will, their opera glasses playing an important part in the programme. At the end of the second act Arthur was to present himself, under pretext of saluting the person in the box who was the promoter of this little scheme, and was recommended by him to display all the conversational ability of which he was master.

He did not fail in this respect, although the appearance the young lady presented was not exactly calculated to transport him with enthusiasm. She was a tall, awkward, lanky girl, just emancipated from the school-room, carelessly and unbecomingly dressed. Her red hands and thin arms were partially covered with mittens, her hair, gathered in rumpled masses in a chenille net, fell down on her back, upon a dress of white muslin, cut baby fashion, which gave her the appearance of having outgrown it, so short were the sleeves.



We repeat it, a raw school girl, bearing in addition a strange name, Aglaé! Yes, but....

But with a dowry of two or three million francs!....

Eh! Oh!

Without counting what her uncle the Vice-Admiral will leave her....

The devil!....

And, not less certainly, half her god-father's property, a widower, without children, and only a few years between him and the grave....

You are sure of all this?

Ah, well, it does not matter! With Arthur, she was only to be as a last resource, but a resource not to be despised! He had too clear a sense of justice to question this.

With this purpose in view, he unceasingly urged Inez to come to some definite decision.

He did this, it must be confessed, with exquisite delicacy, laying stress most strongly on the suffering she was undergoing.

He set all this before her in glowing colors, laying himself out to make her understand how painful it was for him to leave her in the power of a husband so unworthy of her. With



a heart, so completely devoted to her, it was beyond his strength to remain a passive spectator of such a sacrifice any longer.

And then he, on his side, had scruples. He grew hot with shame, when compelled to accept the Count's outstretched hand, at the moment when he was coveting his most valued possession. His lips trembled to address him as his "dear friend" when in his heart he hated him. It was exquisite torture to him to make one of his party at the club, even when the Count raked in enormous winnings. In fact, it was simple martyrdom to have her husband looking him up, and constantly inviting him to his home.

An end must be put to all this! Did she not herself see the necessity of it?

"Ah! yes, indeed!" she replied. "The pain I experience myself, proves it only too plainly! How many times have my tears deluged the paper upon which I have written, imploring you to keep away, to leave me to my fate, to renounce our fatal affection, to forget me. Ah! no, Arthur. You will never know how my heart has been torn, with these conflicting



doubts. Twenty times, I have had the courage,—Ah! My God! why cannot I say the word: the virtue?—to write you this eternal farewell. And in the end I thought of you, and my courage failed me. ‘What will become of him?’ I repeated to myself, dismayed. And any strength of will I possessed, vanished before the picture of your sufferings, which my imagination conjured up.”

It was at this point in their intimacy that he spoke to her of the marriage which had been suggested to him.

“You! Arthur! marry some one else?”...

“So to attain to the height of your virtue, Inez; and in order to place an insurmountable barrier between us.”

She perfectly understood his intentions, and knew he was capable of the sacrifice. To marry a person one does not love, out of despair, because the real object of their affection is beyond their reach, has always been considered an act of pure heroism. It is the favorite plot in most works of imagination, and Inez possessed an extensive and varied stock of light literature.



To add to this, the name of the young person confirmed her in this opinion. She had met her, and concluded that, before a man like Arthur could resolve to marry a young girl, so badly dressed, awkward and childish, there must be some hidden reason for it. There must be a powerful sense of duty towards another, and a high sense of honor, to drive him to this act of self sacrifice.

Her whole meaning was condensed in one word:

“Suicide!” .....

So be it then, did she consent? Or was it indeed his bounden duty towards her?

Good God! how perplexed she was! Yet for all that, she could no longer trifle with him, and she understood intuitively, that the decisive moment had arrived, when she saw him enter her drawing room that evening.

There was nothing in his general appearance which might keep her to this conclusion. He was in strictly regulation evening dress. Black coat, not a suspicion of jewelry, and his gloves held in the folds of his opera hat.

Neither was there anything out of the com-



mon to be gathered from the expression of his face, except that on observing the complete isolation of the Countess, an unequivocal look of satisfaction brightened his countenance.

Going quickly up to her, as she held out her hand, he said:

“Alone!”

“Hush!” replied she in a whisper, indicating the door leading into the conservatory.

She wished to withdraw her hand from his, but he reassured her with a glance, and in spite of her reluctance, carried it to his lips.

“I am fortunate in finding you at home this evening,” said he, in a louder tone than was necessary.

Upon which he seated himself on the end of the couch on which she reclined, at the risk of crushing her lace skirts, which almost hid him from view.

“What are you about?” said she alarmed.

But placing his fingers on his lips and taking possession of her two hands, he pressed them forcibly against his heart.

“Listen,” said he, “the moment is solemn.



Since yesterday, with Anatole's help, I have prepared everything for our flight."

"Ah! merciful Heaven!" interrupted the Countess, with a look of serious distress.

"Let me explain".....

"At least get up, if any one comes in!"

But he was obstinate, and paying no attention to her remark, continued:

"Presently, the Count, as he is in the habit of doing, will leave you to go and play baccarat at the club, where he will remain until morning...."

"Arthur, I fear I begin to see your meaning."

"As soon as he has turned the corner of the street, I will return for you. A carriage will be in readiness to take us to the station. At five minutes to twelve the train leaves. Tomorrow, when he rings for his valet, the Count will find that his tyranny over you is at an end, and we will be safely installed in some Swiss hotel, engaged in repairing the disorder in our toilettes, which such a long journey is apt to produce. Yes, I have thought of everything; the smallest detail is of importance when it affects the comfort of those we love; so do not



trouble to carry anything with you; you will find all you need awaiting you there."

Although Inez felt grateful, and appreciated his thoughtful care, her lovely face assumed an expression of superb haughtiness, and drawing her hands resolutely away, she rose.

"You must be mad!" she replied.

It took him some time to make her change her mind on this subject. But all his arguments were met with the same objection:

"And the world?...the world?"

So long and so persistently did she reiterate this, that after using all the persuasive eloquence of which he was master, he said, with a touch of temper, that the opinion of the world counted nothing to him.

But feeling he had gone too far, he enumerated to her the reasons which influenced him, and he did it well, for, having a good memory, he recited a number of speeches, culled from the latest novels of the day.

Yet she did not swerve, and, although she looked so grand and willful in this mood, he lost patience at last, and took refuge in an attitude of sad dignity.



“Very well,” said he, in a hollow voice.  
“Adieu, Madame....”

This was so opposed to anything she had anticipated or foreseen, that the change in her countenance was impossible to describe; all the haughty indignation vanished, and in its stead reigned an expression of indefinable uneasiness.

She presented at this moment a fit subject for the pen of a poet.

“Adieu!”....she repeated, as if she had not heard distinctly. “You would not leave me, abandon me, Arthur?”

“I fly from you,” replied the young man excitedly, and with an almost savage accent. “I fly from the abyss open before me. You will not understand that I am incapable of enduring this suspense any longer; that my love for you, and my anger against him who stands between us, is exasperated to the last degree, and that I will be driven to commit some imprudence, perhaps worse; may bring upon him whose name I hate to utter, some serious disaster. And since there is yet time, and in spite of your intellectual superiority, of the senti-



ments you pretend to regard me with, you cannot overcome the prejudices of the class you belong to, and prefer remaining the slave of a society which....of a society which...." (here he repeated some fragments which lingered in his memory). "Ah, well, I say again, I must tear myself away from a danger which is weakening me, which is driving me mad, as you say, and will end by making me do something desperate....Once more, Countess, adieu!"

This word "adieu," having made some impression the first time, he repeated it, adding to its effect, by taking a step towards the door.

Inez seized him by the hand.

"Where are you going?" asked she, with a sort of bewildered look, not unmingled with authority.

"To the Vice Admiral's ball," replied Arthur in a feverish tone.

"This evening?"

"Yes, this evening, and without a moment's delay," added he, without glancing in her direction, fearing some display of weakness on his own part.



“Ah! my God!” gasped the Countess, sinking back on the couch, and exerting all the self-control, of which she was capable, to prevent her tears from falling on the powder with which her lovely face was plentifully covered.

“I repeat it,” cried Arthur, approaching her again, “the moment is a solemn one. If you refuse to fly with me, I will immediately present myself there, and I give you my word of honor, marry Aglaé, careless of the consequences, the responsibility of which rests with you, Countess; that is the responsibility of sacrificing my life, of causing this suicide—I use your own words—‘This suicide of my soul.’ ”

The repetition of this last phrase, was accomplished by an aspect of such funereal gloom, that Manfred, Rolla, and other types of the melancholy hero, sank into utter insignificance.

Inez was visibly affected by this appeal, but before she could answer—perhaps own her defeat, who knows!—a sound of approaching



voices forced them to assume the appearance of ordinary acquaintances.

“Ah!” said the Count d’Aldaia, coming forward and offering his hand to Arthur, “you here, my dear fellow. How are you?”

Arthur, feeling excessively uncomfortable, replied:

“How are you?”

So that neither of the two, arrived at a very definite conclusion as to the state of the other’s health.

The remainder of the guests followed. They came to take leave of the Countess.

In paying his respects, Arthur said to her in a low voice:

“I will go with them; but on the first opportunity, I will leave, and shall return to get your final decision.”

She looked at him in a supplicating manner, as if asking for a respite. He was inflexible.

“Your final decision!” replied he, clinching his teeth.

She saw him disappear, arm in arm with her husband, and in a state of overwhelming anxiety, she pressed her hands to her head, even



at the risk of disarranging her hair; then with an altered voice, she asked herself:

“What am I to do?”





## CHAPTER III.

### THE COUNT D'ALDAIA UNEXPECTEDLY APPEARS.

Believing herself alone, Inez gave herself up to serious reflection, when suddenly a friendly hand was laid on her shoulder. She turned quickly round, and found herself confronting the Baroness d'Iosk.

"My dear," said her friend, "I have sent the Baron for a cab; one of my brown bays has had his knees broken through the carelessness of the coachman, and if you don't object, I should like a little friendly talk, during his absence."

When one woman proposes to have a friendly talk with another, even the most unsuspecting will try to be as much on her guard as possible.

The Countess instinctively felt that she must



exercise caution during the impending interview.

“Well, my dear, what have you to say?” replied she, carefully on the defensive.

The Baroness, after indulging in a few more honied phrases, came to the point.

“Do you know what people are saying?” she remarked.

And without waiting for an answer, she added:

“They say the Count is ruined.”

“Excuse me,” said Inez.

“Let my friendship for you speak, my tender friendship,” resumed the Baroness. “I am telling you this simply for your own sake; for you know how I love you! Well, my poor, dear friend, not only is he ruined, but he is also deeply in debt; and there is a report that they are going to prosecute him, and that this house, with all it contains, must be sold; and owing to his position as a foreigner, that he is in danger of being arrested.”

Inez had turned pale.

The Baroness noticed it, and following up this first advantage, charitably gave the



finishing stroke by leaning forward and whispering close to her ear:

“He is reduced to all sorts of expedients: Such as trusting to some lucky *coup* at baccarat!....”

Then supposing, not without reason, that she had made herself sufficiently disagreeable to her “dear friend,” she took up a position directly facing her, so as to have a full view of the effect produced.

“Are you sure of this?” murmured the Countess.

“How! sure? Alas! unfortunately too sure! He plays all night.”

“And does he never win?” asked the Countess half aloud, in spite of herself, and seeming to implore some little consolation.

“Win? Oh! my poor darling, how can he win, with a thousand fears in his heart? It takes a man with pluck to win. The Count is afraid; he is timid, hesitating, and when he does have a run of luck, has not the nerve to follow it up.”

During these last remarks, couched in the



most orthodox cant of the club-room, Inez had regained her self-possession.

“Don’t alarm yourself, my dear,” said she assuming an air of superior knowledge. “Matters have not gone quite so far. You know whether the Count has anything to hide from me; so I am happy to be able to re-assure you, if only to prove how deeply I feel—and that is saying very little!—all your affectionate and loving solicitude on my account.”

She took her friend’s hand, and pressed it warmly.

“I am touched to the innermost recesses of my soul,” added the Countess. “Rejoice with me, kind friend: the danger was only a threatened one, fortunately! At the most, a short delay, entailing no serious consequences. This is the truth, but it must be between ourselves.”

“Good gracious! dearest, do I require to be warned?”

“The truth is this: some infiltrations were discovered in the mine. They neglected to take proper precautions at the beginning, so some of the galleries are flooded. But the



Count has telegraphed his orders. Already the water pumps are working and, very shortly, all will be in working order."

"Who told you all this?" asked the Baroness.

"My husband."

As a usual thing, she was careful to avoid the use of these words "my husband," which in her opinion, savoured too much of the inferior classes. But in this particular instance, she felt they would give additional weight to her confidence.

To her great surprise, her "dear friend" manifested no signs of relief. On the contrary, the excellent woman turned away her eyes and lowered her head, as if overwhelmed.

"What is the matter?" exclaimed Inez.

"Ah! gracious Heavens! my poor friend," cried the Baroness, as if carried away by her feelings of affection, "my heart aches to hear you speak in this way, and it is as much as I can do, to restrain my tears."

"What do you wish to say? Would you doubt?...."

"That the Count told you this? Certainly



not. But what distresses me, is to see a charming woman like you, as a rule so clear-sighted and discerning, place any faith in such a story."

The Countess was conscious of a choking sensation in her throat, akin to real alarm; for she did in fact firmly believe in the flooded mine.

"The infiltrations" resumed the Baroness, with redoubled interest, "my poor darling.... A romance! And the truth, as you say, the unhappy truth is, that there is a revolt at the mine. The Count's manager is at the head of the strike, and almost all those who wished to remain faithful to the legitimate possessor, have been massacred. The rest have taken flight, and the rebels are in possession of the mine, and working it for their own profit alone. There it is, the unhappy truth, my dear!"

The unfortunate Inez could think of no retort, and the Baroness continued, with tears in her voice:

"Ah! well all this would count for nothing, if!....."



"Many thanks" said the Countess, as if in spite of herself.

"Nothing, my dear! For do you know what they add, what they have the infamy to add? They say that if the Count has delayed to go and bring these rebels to order,—and it is acknowledged that his mere appearance would make the most insolent tremble!—it is that he has lost all his energy, all interest in life."

"And why? But why then?"

"Why? Ah! that is almost too delicate a subject, Countess!"

"Delicate?"

"You are sure you will not be offend d with me?"

"Certainly not."

"Quite sure?"

"I give you my word of honor, Baroness; but, in the name of heaven, speak; this suspense is killing me!"

"Ah!" said the other, "If it was not that I love you!...."

"For pity's sake continue!"

"Very well, darling, if the Count is not



there, if he is unworthy of himself, of his past, lost to all feelings of ambition, and of what is due to you, it is that grief devours and paralyzes him."

"Grief! What grief?"

"Jealousy!"

"He jealous? Of whom?"

"Of the Prince!"

"Swenska? That ridiculous caricature! How absurd!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the Baroness triumphantly, "that is exactly what I said to those who thought themselves so well informed."

"Indeed!" said Inez, a little anxious and wounded. "You thought it your duty?...."

"To listen to any accusation against you? I never would forgive myself. 'It is absurd!' said I. If the Count was jealous of Monsieur de Fandansec, well and good! There might be some reason in that perhaps; but jealous of the Prince! It is the height of absurdity!"

"Indeed," said the Countess stiffly, "I am under great obligations to you!"

This was said in a tone which threatened a storm; it was one of those amiable conversa-



tions, bristling with feminine darts, the cruelty of which has always appeared to be the exclusive property of the gentler sex.

Already, on both sides, they had begun to sharpen their tongues, when the Baron, suddenly putting in an appearance, broke up this war of words, compelling both parties to call a truce, as to continue before one of the inferior sex, would be *in fra dig*. Besides being imprudent.

He came to look for his wife, and in addition, they had no time to lose.

They parted, with a hundred polite phrases on both sides, pressing each other's hands, and even, because they dared not bite, embraced each other.

Then the Countess, for the time being, put aside the rage, towards her "dear friend," that was consuming her, and tried to face the true state of affairs, feeling that at all costs, she must take the decisive step and that without delay!

She could no longer have any doubt of the Count's ruin. This tradesman, who had been so insolent, was not the first or only creditor,



who had left the house with loud sounding threats. For some weeks past she had heard of several scenes of the same description, and the servants were becoming careless in the discharge of their duties, and less respectful in their general bearing. A very bad sign!

How find a remedy for this state of affairs? What could she count upon?

A *coup* at baccarat might happen without doubt, but that would not do much towards remedying matters. It would scarcely do more than meet the demands of a few creditors; and in all likelihood, the losses of the following night, would swallow up the gains of the preceding one.

No! There was nothing to hope for from that quarter.

The Baroness had spoken of another means, the arrival of the Count at the mine.

But could he certainly count on success there? Would it be in his power to reduce those rebels to order?

Inez felt she could not count upon that. He was so changed now, he who had been known formerly as the "Terror of the Pampas"



One glance from him had been sufficient to quell the spirit of the bravest. In those days, also, he could trust to the strength of his herculean arm, which combined with the activity of his vigorous frame, served him in many an hour of need. But now he was the mere shadow of his former self.

Suppose they only laughed at him over there?

As for trusting for redress to the laws of the country, she judged correctly that it would be useless. In the towns one might obtain a hearing, although more than once it had happened that the judge had been assassinated in open court, and the pleading counsel, finding their case hopeless, fired their revolvers at the magistrates, to prevent them passing sentence. A favorite means of obtaining a reprieve by brute force. But on the pampas, in the deep recesses of these high mountains, in these wilds where regular soldiers have never penetrated, how could one hope to reclaim their rights?

And then, to defend your cause, is very fine no doubt, when one has a talent in that direc-



tion, plenty of money to lay down in advance, and papers properly drawn out; yet even this does not always prevent the possibility of a loss.

Had the Count any particular talent for chicanery? But little. Formerly, his habit had been to cut short all cavilling, by ordering the grumblers to be hanged. As for money, he had none. Lastly, as to titles of property, he acquired that as he did his public position: by presumption, yes; public notoriety to as great an extent as possible; but papers, reliable papers, properly signed, sealed and registered, not one existed!

In short, he had been in a way the discoverer of this mine: that is, happening to be in that part of the country, he encountered people, who were employed in some way there. When he discovered the nature of their work, he made a polite proposition to the effect, that they should yield up the greater part of the products to him, upon which the others, betraying natural indignation and becoming angry, he, with the other bandits who composed his troop, fell upon, shot, stabbed them,



and finally, after burying the dead, took possession of everything.

It is said, that in olden times in Europe, where such respect is paid to the laws of the present day, property, and the privileges appertaining thereto, had the same origin. I recognize this fact without effort, having read not a little history; but these plunderings, and murders, had the sanction of the times, and also that of Holy Mother Church, who received her due share. Even the poets did not withhold their approval, and sounded their praises, in glowing verse, declaring them heroic.

But over there, it was quite another matter. The institutions are only of yesterday; and what church do these miscreants belong to, who have but recently abandoned the playful habit of having cold missionary for supper, and above all, where are their poets?

There is no possible comparison, and Inez, had the greivous conviction forced upon her, that the Count was irretrievably ruined.

In this case, would it not be wisdom on her part, to seriously consider M. de Fandansec's proposition?



It seemed so to her, and she determined to go with him.

One fact held her in anxious doubt: Arthur loved her, it is true, but to what extent? This was the doubt which troubled her just now.

That he loved her, she believed, but, so had a good many others; even this Prince Swenska had spoken of divorce and marriage, if his dependent position on the Emperor of all the Russians had not interfered with his liberty of action. But Arthur, could she count upon his love, as being strong enough to stand the test of waiting, until the necessary time for the accomplishment of all the formalities of naturalization should have passed? She had his word, it is true. The word of a man of honor, which counts for much, she granted that; nevertheless, an engagement entered into distinctly and formally, was not to be disdained.

She thought so at least, but would have wished for some solid guarantee; in a word, to have some hold on him, that was all!

Yet, a lady, and of her rank, could she exact anything like a forfeit, should he break his promise? It was a difficult question to de-



cide. What could she do? She went through every species of mental torture, trying vainly to discover some way out of this dilemma, and a way which would avoid wounding a thousand susceptibilities.

At such times, it often happens, that failing to discover any expedient, pleasing on all points, one rejects everything which is only half satisfactory, and trusting to the inspiration of the moment says:

“I will trust to my luck!....” which is evidently adopting a very free mode of speech, but characteristic and conclusive.

The Countess had arrived at just such a state of feeling, when the footman, not without a malicious air of enjoyment, announced:

“Monsieur de Fandansec.”

In the presence of her servant, Inez pretended astonishment.

“You!” she exclaimed, as if his visit had been altogether unexpected. “What can have happened? Have you forgotten anything?”

But as soon as the footman had disappeared, she adopted a very different manner,



and, coming deliberately up to Arthur, she took his hand and placed herself before him.

“You do love me,” said she, in a vibrating voice. “You wish me to go away with you; that is to say, you ask of my affection the greatest sacrifice that a pure-minded woman, a Christian, and one occupying a high position in society can make: the sacrifice of my duty!”

“Well!” replied Arthur, slightly non-plussed at this unexpected beginning.

“And,” continued the Countess, “you hope that I will fly with you, who, without any other thought—ah, remember!—promise to obtain a divorce for me in the most orthodox manner.”

“I swear it,” cried the young man, holding up his hand.

The Countess fixed her eyes on him with a questioning gaze, and then, after a solemn silence:

“I consent!” said she. “Let us fly together; I am ready.”

“Ah! Countess! Countess!” exclaimed Arthur, in a delirium of joy, interrupting her.



Inez was satisfied; but, wishing to put him still further to the test, she resumed:

“One moment! I would not deceive you by leaving you in ignorance of what may be the consequence of this act. There must be no concealment between us; no room for the smallest doubt, so that no shadow of regret may ever come between us and our love. Listen, then, to what I have to say.”

“Willingly,” replied the young man, drawing out his watch. “Yet....”

The Countess was, beyond doubt, too much absorbed in her own thoughts to observe this movement on Arthur's part, for, without awaiting the conclusion of his sentence, she began:

“I was fifteen years old, innocent and without any worldly ambitions. My life passed tranquilly with my parents in their *Bayou*. There were times, I will not deny it, when the vast expanse of the heavens, the precipitous course of the Rio, the mutterings of the thunder, reverberating solemnly among the solitudes of our mountain fastnesses, of which the crests, crowned with eter-



nal snows, shot boldly upwards, losing themselves in the clouds, have made my pulses tingle, and quickened the beating of my young heart. Nevertheless, I repeat it, innocent and devoid of ambition, I dreamed in only a vague manner of extending my sphere of life.

“One day a young man presented himself at our home, the paternal *Bayou*. He was tall, haughty looking, superb, with a look of command in his eyes. His hair, overshadowing his broad forehead, seemed like the mane of an enraged lion. Such was the Count!

“Sometimes, in my rides on the *pampas*, I had obtained glimpses of him, and, without suspecting it, had evidently made an impression, for he came with the express purpose of asking my hand in marriage from my father.

“He refused. Why? you will ask....”

“No,” said Arthur, taking out his watch again. “I must remind you, Countess, that it is late, and we must be at the railway station before midnight. Also, as we will have eighteen good hours to pass on the train, you will have uninterrupted leisure to conclude this



narration, which will lose, perhaps, by being hurriedly told."

"No," said Inez, in her turn. "It is a matter of conscience with me, that you should hear all before. I continue...."

"Come," thought the young man, "there is no use trying, she must have her own way!"

"Well," pursued the Countess, "my father refused; but with infinite courtesy and politeness, as you may imagine. In the first place, civility was natural to him, and then prudence dictated it. He knew the reputation of the Count, and understood that to thwart him was to risk bringing disagreeable consequences in its train.

"It was so, alas! as you will hear.

"Upon his request being thus refused, the Count made no remark, betraying neither disappointment nor annoyance, and when the interview was ended, got up, bowed gracefully to the ladies of the family, and withdrew slowly, smiling in a manner which left a disagreeable impression.

"Oh! Arthur, what a smile! If you had seen it on his lips, perhaps you would never have



dared to entertain those sentiments in your heart, which have placed us in this delicate position."

Arthur chafed indignantly at this remark. Did she suppose he was afraid, afraid of a smile?

The Countess divined his thoughts, for, interrupting him in advance:

"Pardon me, Arthur," said she, "It was a womanly fear, the natural doubts of a dependent, nervous woman. I ought not to have said it."

"Meanwhile, my father was anything but re-assured, and at night he took more than ordinary precautions to secure everything inside our dwelling, and arming his slaves, he organized outposts and pickets.

"Vain precautions," continued the Countess. "That night there was to be a catastrophe. Oh, that night!" she almost moaned, placing one hand on Arthur's arm with an almost loving pressure. "I can see it all again. Knowing what was taking place, I did not go to bed. Leaning against the window, I tried to accustom my eyes to the fast disappearing



daylight, to penetrate the deepening darkness, which to me was full of mysterious danger, and listening intently, forced myself to notice the slightest movement.

“Nothing more than ordinary happened, however: the hissing of a serpent, the distant bellowing of the buffalo, the plaintive crying of some crocodile, hidden under the impenetrable brush of an Ananas forest, confused murmurs, which generally soothed me to sleep, were all I heard. Why, then, did I feel anxious and oppressed? What presentiment of coming evil was it that froze my veins with terror?

“The one thing that enabled me to hope, was the absence of moonlight. I concluded that on such a dark night they would make no attempt to attack us. This was also the opinion of my father, and I tried to sustain myself with this hope, in order to subdue the terrible apprehension which wrung my heart.

“Suddenly—indescribable terror!—a sinister light reddened the clouds; a light crossed with furrows—furrows of black smoke! The plain was illumined by the red glare of the increasing flames, and shadows wandered here



and there in an uncertain manner. It was a young forest that they had set on fire. A Cyclopean torch, worthy of lighting the theatre of an unheard of crime!

“Very soon the sound of firearms was heard; a struggle was taking place at the enclosure of the *Bayou*. The gates were burst open, our faithful slaves strewn on the trampled grass, to the joy of myriads of hideous insects, who, unconscious vehicles of universal circulation, rendered to the great current of life the shreds of decaying bodies, which, later on, they would dispute with the vultures. We were losing ground before the overpowering number of the invaders, and the house was besieged on all sides, doors were driven in, windows smashed, and intermingled with the din were heard oaths and hideous curses!

“It was too much! I fainted, unable to offer the slightest resistance. And what else could be expected from a delicately nurtured young girl?

“On recovering from my stupor, I found myself on horseback with the Count, who supported me with his arm while urging his steed



to a full gallop. The instinct of self-preservation caused me to cling to his shoulders, and we fled along like the wind.

“The new forest continued to blaze and savage howls were heard to proceed from it. The deer and serpents, surprised by the fire, fought together in their fury to escape from the entanglement of the scorching plants, producing a Dantesque concert, accompanied by rumblings like the deep wailings of a church organ, caused by the quickened tread of the terrified herds, fleeing from their impending doom.

“This mad race lasted a long time, when at last—bitter and derisive contrast—the dawn of approaching day began to tinge the mountain tops with a rosy glow.

“Half way down a valley, carpeted with wild flowers, I perceived a sort of roof, surmounted by a cross, and I felt there would end our mad flight.

“Indeed, at ten steps from this hermitage—for such it was; I had divined only too correctly—the sainted retreat of a pious monk, the Count stopped his tired horse. We were alone, for the course of his racer had been so rapid,



that the bandits, whom he had ordered to follow, had not been able to keep up with us.

“While waiting for them, he allowed me to slip down to the ground, then descending in his turn, he knelt at my feet.

“‘Ah!’ said he with the utmost gentleness, which was very far from what I anticipated, ‘if my conduct seems devoid of those formalities which citizens believe indispensable, I pray you to attribute it to the violence of a passion which nothing can moderate.’

“Although his compliments were flattering, I could not give him my undivided attention, so anxious and disturbed was I, on account of the fate reserved for my parents.

“But he, divining the cause of my pre-occupation said in a tone of sincere regret:

“‘Why did they compel me to such a desperate act, which my love for you alone can excuse? However, have no fear, they are alive.’

“I could not restrain a sigh of relief.

“‘They are alive,’ he repeated, ‘and carefully strapped down to their beds, until a messenger can arrive with the news that a sacred tie unites us, when the revered progenitors of



your being will be once more placed at liberty.'

"'For,—at least I may hope so—' added the Count, proudly, 'you cannot for one moment have harboured a doubt that I could be the means of causing a blush of shame to stain your virginal brow? Re-assure yourself. The Count d'Aldaia is a man of the world, imbued with principles of honor and loyalty, a code with which he has always been familiar. This is a marriage, a real marriage; blessed by a minister of Heaven, which will bind me, in this life and the next, to your service; and makes me your respectful adorer, your humble and devoted slave.'

"Well I own it, Arthur?" continued the Countess, "I was touched by this avowal; but from natural modesty and a sense of decorum, I concealed my feelings and maintained a dignified silence,—which he told me later—did not fail to impress him.

"When his two lieutenants rejoined us, they had undoubtedly received all their orders beforehand; for without taking time to draw breath, one of the two advanced rapidly in the direction of the hermitage, and kicked open



the door with such force as to shake the whole edifice.

“The good monk appeared instantly.

“He was as thin as a lath, as weak as a vine prop, and as yellow as an ear of maize, but with a look of veneration in spite of his worn garments and neglected appearance.

“He was, I have since discovered a learned man, who had the sacred text at the tips of his fingers. A protestant by religion, conviction, and temperament, even to the length of protesting against protestantism, he had, if not exactly invented, at least discovered a new religion, which promised nothing less than universal happiness, and which he had the contrariety to preach in the desert; as in the towns, when he dared to open his lips, his brother clergymen, as was right in their eyes, raised a mob sufficient to tear him to pieces.

“The moment he appeared on the threshold of his cabin, the two bandits pointed their pistols at his breast, and the Count said to him with the most marked deference:

““My father, you have received a mission



from on High to bind and unbind here below, and you will lay me under an obligation, if you will unite us, this young girl and myself, in the holy bonds of matrimony.'

" 'I know it is taking you unawares, and that under such circumstances it is unusual to publish the bans, but as not a soul breathes in these grand solitudes, we may dispense with these formalities all the more, as with a negligence I now reproach myself for, we have omitted to provide ourselves with the necessary papers, and I wish you to pronounce your blessing on our union, without delay. The presence of our two friends, as witnesses, will be a sufficient guarantee for the legality of the proceeding.'

"The revolvers were powerful aids in bringing the monk to a rapid decision, and, almost dead with terror, he replied in one word:

" 'Come!' ....

"It was quickly done, for the good father, in his character of a reformer, had simplified the rites, and when he said: 'In the name of God I pronounce you man and wife!' he sank un-



conscious and breathless on the steps of the altar.

“The Count threw him a handful of gold; misplaced prodigality in a country where there was nothing to buy, for the very good reason that no one had thought of bringing things there to sell. Then my husband, taking me by the hand, remounted me on his horse, and we disappeared at full galop.

“It was over; I was his wife, the Countess Inez d’Aldaïa.”

“Why the devil is she telling me all this,” said Arthur, mentally, who felt anxious as the hours passed rapidly by.

He ceased asking himself, when the Countess, rising and taking his arm, said:

“This is the sort of man, Arthur, whom you wish to rob of his most valuable possession. Ah! well, tell me, if tomorrow or later, when this man discovers our flight, and discovering our hiding place, he appears before us, threatening and terrible, tell me, I beg of you, what would you do?”

Our young hero had not waited until then before thinking of this. Although placing un-



questioning belief in the recital of his fair friend, he thought that whatever might have taken place in that distant country, where also the heat of the sun's rays must have a tendency to over-excite the brain, it was always safe to allow for a little exaggeration. He thought also, that accepting everything in a literal sense, were it only from politeness, affairs could not be conducted in exactly the same manner here. European laws would scarcely countenance such violent proceedings, and in case of the Count suddenly recovering his wild impetuosity of former times, and coming between Inez and her newly found protector, there were soldiers to interfere, and the neighbors would quickly come to the rescue. Then, where was the forest to set on fire? A difficult matter; and, besides, an expensive amusement.

No; all the risk could be summed up in one word, what is understood by well-bred people as an "affair"—a duel. We know what that means in the present day, a thrust of the sword on one side—a scratch!—followed by a verbal process, and a notice in the papers.



Was this going to intimidate a Fandansec? Far from it! It was just what was wanting to establish his success as a fashionable man of the world, and he was not sorry to have the opportunity of giving the finishing touch to his otherwise enviable reputation. An elopement, that always counted for something, assuredly; but if followed by a duel! His mouth watered at the mere prospect.

So in answer to Inez, he experienced a feeling almost sublime in its daring.

“You ask me this,” he cried.

The Countess was charmed with the attitude he adopted. Yet, wishing for something more certain, she was going to insist, when the noise of the carriage gate closing was heard in the silence of the night.

Inez stopped short, and her lovely face expressed a feeling of helpless terror.

“Listen,” she said, in a tone of feverish anxiety.

Very soon they heard the sound of a manly footstep in the outer hall.

She lifted the window curtain, and withdrawing herself quickly:



"It is he" she said. "He suspects us. We are lost."

Apart from laughing, there is nothing so contagious as fear, and Arthur became livid.

"A pistol," he stammered out.

But Inez shrugged her shoulders and raising the seat of the sofa, discovered a cavity, which offered a means of concealment.

"There" said she.

Arthur recoiled from the prospect. His self-esteem was deeply wounded.

"Hide myself" he exclaimed with disdain. "For what do you take me?"

Dismayed, but really imposing, the Countess drew near to him:

"And my reputation?" said she to him, in a tone full of authority. "If you are a man, you cannot hesitate, you dare not hesitate!"

He looked upon himself as the perfection of gallantry, but still he hesitated.

She conquered him with a word.

"I love you!"

At this avowal the young man's objections melted into thin air.

Overcoming his annoyance and mortifica-



tion, he slipped quickly into the recess, throwing towards her a kiss full of passionate ardour.

The cover fell down upon Arthur.

It was time! A second later, and the Count, lifting the hangings, appeared cold and severe as a judge.

He threw a rapid glance around, and seemed rather put out of countenance. Assuredly he had not anticipated finding his wife alone. Making use of the first excuse which offered itself to him—his powers of imagination were not brilliant; one cannot possess every gift!—he said:

“You are surprised to see me, my love? I forgot my handkerchief.”

Inez had some trouble in concealing her emotion, and the natural effect of emotion is benumbing to the faculties. So without offering a remark, she nervously and quickly handed him her own.

The Count, unaccustomed to such attention, recovered himself, and remarking the agitation of his wife:

“How your hand trembles,” he said.



Danger seemed to exercise a galvanic effect upon the Countess. Instead of taking refuge in some trifling excuse, she out of mere bravado, seemed to invite a storm.

"There is reason enough certainly," she replied, without knowing exactly what she intended to add.

"What is the matter?"

Upon which, working herself up into a pretended state of excitement:

"There is this:" she replied, "that your habit of leaving me night after night alone, naturally conveys the impression that you are tired of me; that you abandon me, and leave the field clear for any who would try to console me. That is what is the matter!"

A light flashed in the old freebooter's eyes.

"And who would dare?" said he, stopping suddenly, as if struck speechless at the bare idea that any could have the audacity to raise his eyes to Inez.

"Yes!" she said. "It becomes you to adopt such a tone. After all, is it not your own fault? What strange mania possesses you, to surround me with young men, whose first



thought is to win favors from women more or less abandoned? Not a week passes that you do not introduce some fresh acquaintance with whom I have nothing in common, and who weary me with languishing looks to commence with.

“Blood and thunder!” yelled the Count; “they dared to go so far?”

“Perhaps they wait for your permission!”

“Come, you are surely joking, Countess?”

“Joking! Oh, you husbands, you are all the same; all and always the same!”

“I do not agree with you.”

“You are more fortunate than others, my dear Count!”

“One name? I defy you to give me one name, Inez.”

“You really wish it?”

“Come! you are amusing yourself at my expense, and to keep me from the club. I know these women’s wiles.”

“Ah! well, so much the worse!” cried the Countess, exasperated and humiliated by the apparent incredulity of the Count. “If you insist on having a name, I shall give you one.



I choose it, by chance, from among the crowd."

"Tell me, if only to prove ...."

Inez, piqued beyond endurance, forgot all prudence.

"And if I say Monsieur de Fandansec?" said she, with a triumphant air.

"Arthur?" replied the Count, with a good-natured smile. "You have chosen badly, my dear. It was he who took me to the club, and I wager he has made his haul upon 'the last nineteen' at the 'Bouillotte;' for he plays like the devil."

"Poor man!" said Inez, shrugging her shoulders. "He accompanied you there. Yes! but instead of making his 'haul' on 'the last nineteen' at the 'Bouillotte,' he gave you the slip, and seeing that I was left to the solitude of my own thoughts, my regrets and the humiliation of finding myself neglected, he came back."

"Here?"

"Here!"

"For what purpose?"

"To tell me of his love!"



"Arthur? Never! You are inventing, my dear!"

"So little" said she, feeling obstinate, knowing she was right.... "that he has actually proposed that I should run away with him."

"You are speaking the truth, Countess?"

"On my honor."

The Count, thoroughly convinced, rushed for his hat, anxious to get out.

"Ah! good heavens!" said Inez, "where are you going in such haste?"

"To find him."

"Where?"

"At the club."

"Who told you he would be there?"

The Count seemed rooted to the spot. What did she mean? What game was she playing? He felt confused, speechless, stupid before this woman, who with her free and easy manner, bantered him so unmercifully.

In fact at this moment she had mastered him. He was at her mercy, and she played with him as a cat does with a mouse.

"And where would he be, then?" asked the



Count, in a dejected tone; "in our house, perhaps?...."

"Exactly."

"In this very room?"

"You burn!"

"Inez," cried the Count, in a state of blind fury, "don't play with my anger!...."

"What big words, my dear!" replied she, shrugging her fair shoulders.

"Where is he?" shouted the Count.

"Well! under the sofa!"

All that was savage in the nature of this adventurer showed itself as if by magic. Drawing a revolver from his pocket, he rushed in the direction of the couch, indicated by the Countess. But as he siezed hold of it, a burst of laughter from the Countess awoke him to the chilling apprehension that he was the victim of a cruel joke, and suddenly stopping, he glanced anxiously at her.

She rolled in the chair on which she had thrown herself, laughing like an Olympian Goddess; almost swooning with hysterical excitement, so excessive was her enjoyment of the scene.



"Ah!" said she, "How ridiculous he is! It passes all I ever imagined! That he should be so easily taken in!....Ah! oh! how it hurts to laugh so much, it is really too much! Oh! the pain in my side! Ah! I am suffocating, this will kill me"....

And again she screamed with loud irrepressible laughter. She could have sat for Augustine Brohan before the "Bourgeois Gentlehomme."

For a long time the Count was left to swallow his wrath in silence. He could not get in a word, but at last, with a saddened air, he asked her:

"Are you trying to make a fool of me, Inez?"

Then the young Countess getting up, assuming an air of superiority, ridiculed him with condescending pity.

"Do you think I was for one moment the dupe of this forgotten handkerchief?"

"But...."

"Ridiculous pretext, in order to conceal wounded jealousy; that was all! Very well! I have given you a Roland for your Oliver. If I



have been successful, admit it, and applaud; or you will expose yourself to general ridicule, Monsieur le Comte de Bartholo."

We have already said that she was not ignorant of the fashionable literature of the day. The expedient to which she had had recourse, to save her from an imminent danger, was sufficient evidence of this.

She had not invented this farce. She had borrowed the idea from one of Balzac's works: "The Physiology of Marriage."

Yet, to make up her mind to have recourse to it, a certain amount of daring was necessary; for if the Count, on his side, had read this work, this farce would have ended in a tragedy, and laughter would have ended in tears. Her hardihood consisted in having dared to risk it. Perhaps the severe moralist will substitute the word boldness for the one which we employ. But what can be done? There are situations so critical that no time can be wasted in weighing scrupulously the means adopted for getting safely out of it. There was cunning employed, certainly, and that is blameable in the highest degree. Who



says to the contrary? Only everything must be taken into consideration, and so long as a woman's position in society remains that of a slave, of a minor, passing from the authority of a father to that of a husband, we must expect these oppressed ones to have recourse to any shift in order to break the fetters which bind and degrade them.

Ah, when later we have procured this emancipation, of which divorce is the first step—the emancipation dreamt of by socialists of high aims and lofty designs—then we will see this sex possessed of the rights which are now denied them, scorn to descend to those practices which a Jesuit—even—hesitates to employ in a worthy cause.

But, alas! we are far from the realization of this dream, far from that enfranchisement which has been so often promised us! And since we have scarcely begun to organize a congress, where elderly ladies can seek redress for their wrongs, and of whom they make a mere diversion, let us be philosophical, and grant the benefit of extenuating circumstances to this mass of would-be socialists, whose re-



ligion, even while consecrating their pretended subjection and inferiority, permit, in a way, instinctive duplicity.

This is why, benevolent reader, we beg you not to be the first to throw a stone at our heroine. Think of her past; imagine the danger of her position, surprised by an angry, passionate man, whom others, fully armed, had not been able to resist, and ask yourself, what would you have done in her place?

The Count, as crestfallen as a fox caught in a trap, managed to get out of his difficulty, with some apparent dignity. His face brightened, and dropping on his knees before Inez, he murmured in a caressing tone:

“Forgive me!”

She was good at heart, for she could not resist him.

“Naughty fellow!” she said, with an accent which betrayed the weakness of the disarmed conqueror.

And he, charmed to be let off so easily, embraced her warmly.

They seated themselves on the sofa and a gracious dispute began.



"I was wrong," said the Count. "I was wrong in appearing to neglect you. And to begin with, look here, my Inez; I will not return to the club this evening. There, am I not good?"

She appeared touched by this.

"Ah!" said she, pleasantly, "I do not wish to exact my pound of flesh. It is enough that you will not continue the habit. And since it happens that this evening you have friends with you, go and rejoin them at this tiresome club. I permit you to do so freely."

"No. I would never forgive myself."

"But if I consent, and even advise it."

"Am I in your way? Do I weary you?"

"What an idea!"

"Well, then?"

"A little punishment is, I think, advisable, under the circumstances. If it were not so late, I would ask you to take me to some theatre, but I will reserve that for tomorrow, and to keep you two nights from your club would be too much. I do not want to be too hard on you, my lion, or to ask too great a sacrifice on your part."



“Oh!” said the Count, ‘sacrifice!’ what a word! A ‘sacrifice’ which consists in remaining near you?....”

Gradually he had allowed himself to slip on his knees before her, and kissed the tips of her fingers.

There was an interchange of soft nothings for a few moments longer, then Inez withdrew herself from his arms.

“Count,” said she, leaving him still on his knees, “since it is I who give orders this evening, go back to the club.”

“You wish it?”

“Yes. I insist, that you may not think me jealous of the Green Cloth! It is caprice and willfulness on my part.”

The Count got up, but happening to look behind the sofa, he saw, upon a work basket, a black satin object, shining like a mirror.

It was Arthur’s opera hat!

His surprise was so great that he could not restrain a slight exclamation.

“What is the matter?” asked the Countess.

“Nothing,” replied the Count immediately.



"I strained myself getting up; it is all over now."

Then approaching nearer to his wife, and still keeping up an appearance of tenderness:

"So" said he, "it is true my Inez, you are sincere in wishing me to leave you this evening?"

"I order you!" replied she, with the air of a spoilt child.

And by a graceful, cat-like movement, she slipped into his arms, holding up her face.

"You are an angel!" said the Count embracing her. "I am off. I obey you. But, tomorrow!...."

"Ah! tomorrow!"

"Yes! tomorrow."

She accompanied him to the hall, and parted from him with a friendly wave of the hand.

Ah! she was really charming!

It must not be forgotten, that during this little domestic scene, Arthur lay concealed in the depths of the sofa, not losing one syllable. It will not be necessary to attempt a descrip-



tion of his appearance, when he emerged from his hiding-place.

Any illusion was a thing of the past. He was overwhelmed, worse yet, wounded and humiliated to an extent impossible to imagine!

"Ah! my God! my God!" he exclaimed, "is it possible that a Fandansec could have been placed in such a position!"

Memory once more conjured up the vision of his ancestors in the castle of Bicheterre. He saw them turning aside their faces from him, and moving their lips as if to pronounce maledictions on the head of their descendant. A hideous nightmare, a phantasmagorical picture, which bathed him in cold perspiration. Confined air probably; symptoms of congestion.

The Countess appeared anxious to console him. After helping him to remove the dust from his coat, she chafed his hands in order to restore circulation.

"Well," said she to him at last, "do you not feel a little better? We can go now."

"Go!" repeated Arthur.



"Heavens! Fate has decided for us! The crisis is over, without doubt, but the danger still exists; there is no other course open to us. The servants know you are here,—and what must they think? Good God! to see their master leave us alone!—tomorrow, the Count will learn the truth, and then!...."

"It is true," replied the young man, "there is no possible means of drawing back."

Perhaps he had not quite recovered from the effect of his imprisonment, for his accent was altogether wanting in enthusiasm.

And he mentally reflected:

"This, then, is 'High Life.' I had conceived quite a different idea."

Inez had wrapped herself up in a large burnous.

"I am ready!" she said.

"So am I," replied Arthur.

He looked for his hat, all the time repeating to himself, inwardly:

"So this is what it is!....I had conceived quite a different idea; but I could not say differently if my head was on the block."

Scarcely had they quitted the room, when



one of the side hangings were parted, and a head appeared, that of the Count d'Aldaïa! Perceiving no trace of the fugitives, he stepped forward, and going to the balcony, threw a searching glance around, after which, returning to the window, he raised the curtain and listened.

A voice was heard outside: "The gate please!"

He did not stir.

Ten seconds later, a distant sound assured him of the departure of Arthur and the Countess, an assurance which was soon confirmed by the sound of carriage wheels.

Leaving the window, the Count advanced to the middle of the room, and yielding himself up to the influence of the Parisian surroundings in which he had lived for some year's past, he expressed his thoughts in the cant of the "upper ten:"

"That's over! It's his turn now!"

He let himself drop into a chair, and with an air of indescribable relief he heaved a sigh:

"Ouf!"



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE FOURTH ACT OF "FROU-FROU."

*"To Monsieur Arthur de Fandansec,*

*Hotel Beau-Rivage, Geneva, Switzerland:*

"HAPPY RASCAL AND DEAR FRIEND:

"Enjoy your happiness in peace. I was in dread of scandal! But you were born under a lucky star, and I am supremely contented. No one has taken the slightest notice of your departure. No one seems to be aware that you have carried off the 'star' of the foreign colony; this fascinating woman, whom a detestable tie bound to a husband altogether unworthy of her!

"I feared that the journals might speak of it. I have read them all. Not a word.

"So I repeat, my dear friend, enjoy your happiness in peace."

At this point of the letter Arthur felt discontented, annoyed.

To go the length of running away with another man's wife, a leader of fashion, and no one to take any notice of it! It was, by Jove! hardly worth the trouble!



When he had fretted and fumed over this for some moments, he took up his letter and continued to read:

"One person only has spoken to me on the subject:" added his correspondent, "The Vice Admiral.

"Your absence from the ball, where you promised to give him your final answer, with reference to his niece, led him to think you were ill. The following morning he sent his valet to your rooms. He was told you had left town.

"It was on hearing this, that he called on me. I thought it best to tell him the truth, and as he expressed, in my opinion, rather too much astonishment at the preference you had shown for the Countess d'A....., I took the liberty of correcting his judgment regarding the facts as they really were.

"'In my turn I am astonished' said I to him, 'that you could have counted upon the success of this marriage project. Certainly, a union with your niece is not one to be disdained, as far as fortune and position go; but you will, I am sure, acknowledge that she has not much to recommend her in the way of personal attractions.'

"'Tall, thin, almost bony, and unmistakably awkward, she would not gratify overmuch, the self love of her future husband. You will say she is at an age, when a young girl may still develop many charms. I hope it may be so, for her sake. But I would not go the length of swearing it. And suppose no improvement does take place? That has some times happened.'

"'On the other hand, she conducts herself like a baby, and dresses abominably. She talks at random, making amus-



ing remarks at times, which proves her perfect innocence no doubt, but at the same time provokes a smile. Look at her crossing a room! She does not know how to walk; but hops along like a school-girl, on her way to the play grounds. Now as to her accomplishments. Well! yes, she does not draw badly; shades with some degree of finish; her trees look natural, her perspective correct, and the foreground not wanting in vigor. I allow all this, but again I ask you, what is there in all this to charm? She plays a little on the piano, and she does not sing badly. Her voice is sweet, sympathetic, and has a good range. She plays her accompaniments accurately. No mistakes; every note is played as it is written. A musical box could not rival her in precision. But expression, soul, all that constitutes the artist, where is that?’

“The Vice Admiral gave me his undivided attention. I continued:

“‘While the Countess, Admiral, ah! the Countess!....Her voice is a little tremulous, yes, but what expression! It is true her touch is uncertain, and here and there the time is not all that could be desired, but what style! What manner! Her eyes, have you remarked her eyes? Her gaze directed upwards all the time! Half veiled by her long lashes, the pupils barely visible, only the white showing.’

“‘And what style, what manner! A queen among women. Her most trifling remark is couched in language most carefully chosen; to such an extent as to leave you sometimes in doubt as to her real meaning....In one word, charming, charming, and always charming!’

“‘Can you sympathize now with Arthur’s preference?’



“‘Go on,’ said the old man encouragingly.

“‘Suppose also,’ I added, ‘that Monsieur de Fandansec was an ordinary young man, a new comer. But, such as he is, distinguished, with a style so peculiarly his own, as to attract the notice of all beholders. He might have agreed to trot out your niece as his wife; well, would you call that a fair arrangement?’

“‘I understand,’ said the admiral, ‘yes, my niece is thoroughly unskilled in all those little arts....myself no less, I own. We are wanting in style....it is to be regretted, and if I thought it possible to procure the offices of any one, who would instruct her on these points, I am not the man to hesitate about price. But where could I find such a one? And then, could she learn?’

“‘The wisest thing’ continued he, after a moment of reflection, ‘would be to look for a less brilliant connection, some one more ordinary.’ He looked at me searchingly; then, adopting a confidential tone:

“‘Look here, my dear boy, I am in a hurry, in an awful hurry, to settle Aglaé; for the dear child is terribly in the way.’

“‘I am fifty-three years old, and have sailed about the world since my infancy. At an age when others were amusing themselves, I was a prisoner on board ship, only being able to indulge in any pleasure at long intervals, and then always rushed for time. During one of my leaves of absence, I was fool enough to get married. Always in a hurry, I did not sufficiently understand the character of my future wife. I was unfortunate enough to find myself bound to the most disagreeable, the most exasperating



woman to be met with in the two hemispheres. Ah! my dear boy, what a detestable old scold she was! Simply say to her: 'How are you my dear?' She would draw herself up, and with the tone of a veritable harpy, reply: 'Don't congratulate yourself. I am not yet in my last agony!' So that, when she did arrive at that happy state, I experienced a feeling of great relief.'

"'It was, no doubt, very wrong; but what could one do? She had so embittered my life and everything belonging to it, that to save myself from her clutches, immediately on entering into port I begged for a new commission.'

"'If she did not present me with children, don't be astonished; it would have required the intervention of the Holy Ghost.'

"'She was, without any reservation, what Molière describes as a good-for-nothing jade! And if I did order her tomb to be cemented at every crevice, carefully fastened, sealed and padlocked, it was because I feared she might escape and torment me again.'

"'However that may be, my life has been for these reasons, too prolonged a penance. At liberty at last, I would not like old age to creep upon me without enjoying some pleasure, cost what it may. But Aglaé is an obstacle in my way, and without mincing the matter I would make a sacrifice to get her off my hands.'

"'You are a very clever young man," said he, with a peculiar smile; "take it any way you choose, as a hint if you wish, but come and see us as often as you can.'

"I reflected seriously on this. I said to myself that beauty, fortune and fashion were equally wanting in my-



self; that what would have been for you a '*mesalliance*,' my dear fellow, would be for a body like me an unlooked-for windfall, and as the Admiral invited me to come to lunch that very day, I offered all the polite excuses I could think of, while inwardly possessed with a burning desire to accept.

"At table I passed Aglaé all the side dishes, and when I refused some cream cheese, she insisted on helping me to some, saying: 'You must take some if I help you!....' which obliged me to immolate myself on the altar of politeness, and swallow that detestable compound also.

"We took coffee in the drawing-room, and she herself added the sugar. Then she opened the piano and began to sing, asking me to turn the pages for her.

"At three o'clock, we noticed that for some time the Admiral had left us quite alone. And during the conversation which followed, without the slightest shade of embarrassment, she told me:

"'I see I am very much in my uncle's way, which, without exactly wounding, grieves me deeply. However, I am quite willing to relieve him of this responsibility as soon as I can. There is only one way out of the difficulty, and that is to get married. When the opportunity presents itself I have quite made up my mind to accept whoever is proposed to me. You see, I have been brought up at the Convent, and there they teach us that it is a young girl's duty to accept as her husband any one her parents may approve of, and to force herself by every means in her power to try and please him and make his life happy.'

"'My religion teaches me this, and I mean to try and do what is right.'



“What would you have done, Arthur, if you had been what I am, a struggling young bachelor, without any pretensions to style, and no claim to good looks?”

“I tried to find the words to answer her, and proposed myself as a suitor. But having lunched generously with the Admiral, I experienced some difficulty in expressing my sentiments clearly, and in the absence of mere words, I held out my hand to Aglaé.

“She gave me hers without hesitation. I waited a moment, trying my very best to think of something to say. But finding that words refused to come, I drew her gently towards me and embraced her warmly, while she, in the most unaffected manner, threw her arms around me.

“At this moment, the door opened, and the Admiral entered.

“I expected that he would have cut up rough. Not at all. His face expressed the most profound satisfaction, so much so, that Aglaé, in spite of some frantic efforts on my part, would not release me, and the good old soul said to us, in a voice overflowing with benevolent fatherly affection:

“‘My children, it is perhaps rather soon, but if you will consent to leave yourselves in my hands, you will not have too long to wait.’

“It follows from this, my dear boy, that our marriage bans have been announced for the first time this morning and that in ten days from now I will be her husband.

“The Vice Admiral, made me send in my resignation, and has made me acquainted with the marriage contract, to be drawn up by the family Notary, without further delay.



There is granted to me unconditionally, a portion of five hundred thousand francs, and in case of my wife's death, the half of her personal and private property. The same with regard to purchases, and successions, or deeds of gifts to be compiled. What do you say to that?"

Long as this letter was, it did not stop there. In different postscripts, which betrayed some inward perturbation of mind, the writer offered numerous congratulations to Arthur.

"Ah" said he "At last you have realized your dream, fortunate fellow! And who more worthy of such happiness? You, so superior in yourself, that such material bliss as we poor common citizens enjoy, would be altogether obnoxious to you.

"Enjoy your triumph, you lucky scamp and best of friends, and look with friendly complaisance on the good fortune that has come to an humble admirer, who takes an impartial view of himself, and sufficiently clear-sighted, not to allow himself to aspire to imaginary delights, fitted only for one of your noble nature, and superior excellence!...."

Here the following protestations of friendship, and then the signature:

"ANATOLE PEIGNARD."

Anatole Peignard, as it will be remembered, was Arthur's friend. This excellent friend, good-hearted, no doubt, but not good-looking, who was alone to be entrusted with the address of ~~the~~ fugitives, and keep them posted



as to the consequences which might ensue from their flight.

In this interminable letter, that which struck Arthur most was the absence of any allusions to the Count d'Aldaïa.

What had he done, this injured husband? What had he said on hearing of the wife's flight? Had any one seen him? Had he declared any sort of intention? Had he applied to the police, or was he careering over the mountain and plain, his sword under his arm, with the manifest intention of sacrificing the deceiver and his victim to his just wrath and wounded pride?

"What an odd fellow this Anatole is," said Arthur to himself. "He speaks of himself alone! What can that have to do with me?"

After reflecting a few minutes he hastened to the telegraph office and sent the following message:

*"To Anatole Peignard, Rue Riboute, 321, Paris."*

"Letter received; thanks; but he, you understand; he; what is he doing? what does he say? what are his intentions? Answer; very pressing.

"ARTHUR."



Three hours later he received the following answer:

"GENEVA FROM PARIS .... 3,874....

"22 words .... 1519-7 .... 5.35 P. M."

"*To Arthur de Fandansec,*

"*Hotel Beau-Rivage, Geneva, Switzerland:*

"Strange and retarded news of *him*. Too long and complicated to send by wire. Letter follows."

"ANATOLE."

Thirty hours must pass—and what hours!—before the triumphant corrupter of female virtue could receive this supplementary information:

"*My Dear Arthur:*

"If I failed to give you news of the Count in my former letter, it was because I had not been able to glean any information regarding his movements.

"All that I have been able to learn up to this moment is that on the night of our departure he played at the Club and broke the bank, and raked in one hundred and seventy thousand francs. You see that the proverb is right: unlucky in love, lucky at cards. Don't you play, then; you who are so fortunate in love. Good God! I dream of it at night. How can you exist with such a surfeit of happiness?

"At the Club they accepted their loss philosophically. The envious ones said, with a knowing smile:

"'Never fear, he will bring them all back again!....'

"If he has given them back, it has certainly not been to



his former fellow-players. He has never put a foot in the Club since that night!

"Anxious, as you may imagine, about his movements, and my inquiries being thrown away in that quarter, I sent a clever agent to make inquiries at his hotel and in the immediate neighborhood.

"The first day he returned to me with a most singular, report to the effect that they had kept up dancing to a late hour; there had been illuminations and fireworks; open air concerts and festivities of every description.

"I could not credit it, and the next day I went myself to investigate. No possibility of a doubt. By climbing on the shoulders of my man, so that I could see over the balcony, I witnessed with my own eyes a repetition of the previous evening's amusement. Singing, dancing, illuminations were not wanting. They were carrying on a mad game, at a most infernal pace, sufficient to recall the good old times when Louis XV reigned over fair France, and procured for the people such pleasures as they had long been strangers to.

"I left my uncomfortable post, simply thunderstruck, believing myself the victim of some optical delusion, although the stick of a half burnt rocket, falling on my head, completely singeing one side of my hair, soon convinced me I was not the victim of a dream.

"The next morning, I went in quest of information, and here is the substance of what I learned:

"The house as it stood, with all it contained, had been sold by the Count in a trice,....guess to whom?

"To the Prince Swenska, who had nothing more to do than to change the sheets, and find himself at home. He



had bought up the whole place, out and out, so that the Count had nothing to take away, but his own personal baggage. When the Prince took possession, he sat down to the dinner prepared for the owners of the day before, and they re-lighted the same candles, which the servants had extinguished after your departure.

“I don’t know what price this new fancy cost the Prince, but it must have been a pretty stiff figure, for the Count paid all his debts within the twenty-four hours.

“Now I think of it, there was rather an original scene, between him and an upholsterer, who it seems, had been decidedly insolent to him. The Count went to this man’s establishment, and found him surrounded by his workmen. ‘Sir’ said he to him, ‘Here is the amount of your bill.’ The other, becoming at once obsequious in his politeness, begged that he would follow him to his office, to get a receipt.

“‘Useless! These honest fellows will be sufficient witness that this bill is arranged between us. But we have a second!....’

“‘A second bill? What second bill?’

“‘You have then forgotten your impertinence of yesterday?’

“‘But.....’ replied the other, who, now his money was in his pocket, was less careful of pleasing his customer.

“He did not get time to finish his sentence. The Count laying hold of him by the collar, lifted him up like a pen; then holding him outside the window, which he opened with one blow of his fist:

“‘Apologize,’ said he, ‘or I will let you drop!....’



This appeared so evident to the upholsterer, that he did what was required with an alacrity that was startling. The Count satisfied, let him drop gently on the floor, and withdrew as if nothing extraordinary had happened.

"The same evening he slept at the Hotel Mirabeau, Rue de le Paix. In the morning, when they brought him his coffee, on the mantle shelf there were three louis, and on a sheet of paper, these simple words:

"'Expenses and tips from the traveler who slept here.'

"The hotel clerk had not even registered his name. After that the police were notified, and every possible search was made, but not a trace of the Count could be found. Where is he? Why did he strive to conceal his movements? I lose myself in conjectures.

"At any rate, you will do well to watch!...."

This advice threw Arthur into a state of perplexity. Was it necessary to follow it, and take precautions? Had it been any one else, no matter who, he would not have hesitated to have disappeared for a short time, or even to assume another name.

But it must be remembered, that our young hero had a long line of illustrious ancestors to consider. Three of them had died of the itch in Palestine! One of his great grand aunts had been the mistress of a King of Arragon. There was a Fandansec among the favorites



of Henry the Third. All these personages, types to be found among all our noble families, would they not have reason to reproach their descendant, for showing the white feather? Was he noble, was he a Fandansec, to dissimilate, to appear afraid?

Meanwhile, he owed something to Inez also! But security first. If the Count had been an ordinary man, from whom one might expect the recognized course of conduct under such circumstances, it would have been easier to decide. But Arthur mentally pictured the scene with the upholsterer, the setting on fire of the forest, which now seemed so much less improbable. In those distant countries, one forest more or less did not matter, and no one paid attention to it; at the most, five or six lines would appear in the leading American papers, and there it ended.

Well, supposing that this was the exact truth, what could one expect from a rash, impetuous man, in the habit of proceeding in such a summary manner? Without wounding the susceptibilities of the Fandansec line, his first consideration ought to be for this



young woman whom he now found on his hands. Justice demanded this much, damn it all!

This will explain how, a few days after receiving Anatole's second letter, our travelers left the Beau-Rivage and installed themselves at the other end of the lake, at Chateau-Chillon; not at a hotel, but in a private boarding-house; the sign being painted in flaming English characters, which stood out in a very conspicuous way on the front of the house. Inside also, everything bore the same English stamp. All was English! At the same time the landlady was Austrian and the servants Savoyards. As to the boarders, there were specimens from every nation, even to Hungarians. Also a Pole who possessed an admirable talent for carving a roast leg of mutton and making the ace turn up in *ecarté* with a dexterity that Robert Houdin himself might have envied.

Oh, this delightful retreat! What charming society! I don't believe that even at Deauville they flirted as much as they did in this little family boarding-house! Any pretext was good enough for it, and the most proper would have



thought themselves wanting in what was expected, if immediately after soup being served, they omitted to give an affectionate pressure to their neighbor's knee, if only as an elementary form of politeness.

At dessert they organized a "round game," where the Pole—as was right—exercised his skill so well, that at the stroke of ten, when the game broke up, he managed to take away with him the greater part of the pocket money of the unfortunate boarders.

Not one moment of weariness! After breakfast, they played at hide-and-seek in the garden, and there were continuous shrieks of laughter proceeding from the darkest nooks. On rainy days, they all met in the drawing room, and amused themselves with "innocent" games. Blind man's buff, for example,—frolicsome family game always!—where a young lady with bandaged eyes, had no other means of recognizing the player she caught, than by sitting down on his knees. A little game, absolutely patriarchal in its simplicity!

And then they arranged out of door parties, lunches on the mountains, excursions on don-



keys, which led to all sorts of unforeseen and constantly recurring accidents. There were those who lost themselves among the rocks! and were not seen again until they all returned to the boarding house, without counting those who never returned at all! A regular marriage establishment, a disloyal opposition to the matrimonial agency of M. de Foy!

From the second day of their installation in this joyous retreat, the Countess found herself as completely in her element as a fish in water, and the Hungarian made himself, adopting the fashion of Italy—it was only two steps away, on the other side of that long chain of glaciers to be seen from the window—her “cavalier servant,” in all confidence and honor, this must of course, be understood.

She could not seat herself without his precipitating himself at her with a footstool on which to place her dainty feet. He accompanied her on the piano, kept all her waltzes exclusively for himself, and composed in her honor, madrigals and acrostics, in the purest Hungarian, of which he gave her a literal translation, in the recesses of the window.



Frequently, he engaged a boat, which Arthur rowed until his arms ached, while the magnate—this was one beyond doubt!—scraped on a mandolin, singing songs of his own composition.

But, under all these accomplishments, he had the heart of a patriot, and an exalted mind. It must not be imagined, however, that he accepted lightly the yoke Austria had placed on his country. His eyes flashed when this subject was broached, and it proved the great esteem in which he held Arthur and the Countess that he confided all his projects to them. This was nothing less than to regain the independence of his beloved country, if necessary, by desperate means. National war, insurrection, even the sacrifice of his own life, if it was thought well that he should devote it, towards shortening the life of the emperor of Austria.

Ah! this was not a man to hesitate about anything! Inez could not repress a shudder when she listened to him, and he seemed to her a veritable hero.

Thus, when he found himself in trouble—the



bitter enmity of his political foes not stopping at anything, even to intercepting his money!—she made Arthur understand that he ought to offer his services to the exiled hero. But how scrupulous this Hungarian showed himself under the circumstances! Tears were in his eyes. They were forced to beg him to accept if only a hundred louis; but he exacted, that they should in return accept his note for this temporary loan. Ah! how high souled he was in the midst of it all!

They accepted this note at last; locked it away carefully, and I believe have it to this day; for he left at the end of the season, omitting to pay his bill—he had so many grand projects in view!—and no one has ever heard of him since.

Yet, Arthur and the Countess remained the latest stayers in the boarding house, awaiting the completion of certain legal delays.

Reduced to their own society, by a season which was almost over, they found time hang heavily on their hands, the evenings above all, although Inez had introduced a little game, not too complicated, called: “Beggar my Neighbor.”



It is a sort of "Patience" for two players. They shuffle together twenty packs of fifty-two cards, and each one takes half, and in their turn play the cards one by one. It takes about four hours to play, when one does not finish by falling asleep, with their nose on the cards. Altogether a little family game. Arthur fell into a cold perspiration, when he saw preparations for beginning. He had hoped to amuse himself by subscribing to the Parisian papers; those, I understand, more particularly devoted to chronicling the movements of the fashionable world. By them he was kept posted on all that took place in "High Life," the scandal of the green-room, the chit-chat of the club, of the betting, etc.

But far from satisfying him, the reading of these papers caused him the most frightful heart-ache. He was overwhelmed. Oh! Paris!....

The Countess managed to get along pretty well, though she, too, heaved some deep sighs. But a feeling of duty sustained her.

"Duty?" What did she mean precisely by that? What duty?



Ah, yes; duty! That is, the strict obligation to wait for the moment, according to prescribed law, when it would be possible to buy an estate, become naturalized, and obtain a divorce, then legalize her union with De Fandasec!

The winter and early spring passed in this way, slightly monotonous, it must be confessed. Mont Blanc is certainly magnificent and Lake Lemman, with its translucent waters, is also very beautiful! And this natural grandeur is impressive, no doubt; but always Mont Blanc, always Lake Lemman, and always natural grandeur, finishing up with "Beggar My Neighbor," soon palls on one! There are moments when the dead level of St. Denis, the pond at Auteuil, and the view of a cab drawn by a fiddle-headed charger, with great symmetry of bone, would inspire one with feelings of unbounded delight.

With the first appearance of hot weather new guests began to make their appearance; strangers, as usual, another Pole, and another Hungarian; but not the same, although the newcomer harbored very patriotic sentiments,



and made no concealment of his intention to deliver his country from the yoke of Austria. Like his predecessors, he had political enemies, who infamously threw obstacles in the way of his receiving the revenues he derived from immense properties really belonging to him over there, and although possessing the same delicacy of feeling which distinguished his compatriot, he was honorable enough to offer his note to any who would accommodate him with a temporary loan.

This time, however, Arthur was not to be taken in, and although offering sincere wishes for the success of his undertaking, was always careful to be on the defensive, to an extent that somewhat astonished the Countess, who was deeply interested in the noble exile.

Happily, the moment had arrived, when their own projects were to be realized.

There was no longer any delay. Within six weeks, Inez was proprietress of a very pretty villa, on the borders of the Lake, about twenty minutes drive from Geneva; then, naturalized, divorced, and legally married to Arthur, the happy climax to all they had desired had been attained.



Therefore, strong in his marital rights, Arthur proposed to return to Paris, where he looked forward to carrying things with a high hand, and, with his lovely wife on his arm, be the sensation of the coming season.

“What!” objected the ex-Countess d’Aldaïa; “in July? There is no one in Paris!....”

In support of what she said, she showed Arthur the morning papers that had just arrived.

“Paris is no longer Paris,” chronicled the papers. “All the better classes of society have gone to the seaside, the Pyrenees, or to Switzerland. A crowd, ordinary and commonplace, throng our boulevards, our theatres, the Champs-Élysées, and the Bois. The little Grannier, and Théo, are charmed to appear before these yokels, attired in their best Sunday-go-to-meetings; the jibes and jests of the immortal Christian stick in his throat, and strange forms can be seen wandering about the orchestral stalls!” Pah!

Arthur could not withstand this onslaught. He wanted to make a striking re-appearance in Paris. But could they not go to Trouville?



There were the races in August, and all that constituted the upper ten were sure to be there.

Inez held a different opinion. Since they had passed a whole year in Switzerland, why should they go away without seeing the Oberland, the Lakes of Thounn and Interlaken, the Yungfrau, the Geisbach, on the Lake of Brienz, the Brunig Pass, the Rigi, Lucerne, etc?

These objections seemed to have weight with Arthur, and they departed.

Already, he had a feeling of delight, when on the second day of his sojourn at Berne, he read in the papers, among the list of travelers:

“Hotel du Berneroff:

“Monsieur and Madame de Fandansec and servants.”

That, “and servants,” had an immense effect; looked better on the paper than it was in reality, for the attendants consisted of two abominable Germans—husband and wife—who were the most bare-faced thieves to be met with on this side of the Rhine. Thieving was second nature to them—their natural vocation.



And this marriage, which was the consummation of all his hopes, did not afford Arthur that unalloyed happiness which he had anticipated. He had gained his object it is true, but the reality was not exactly what he had counted on.

It was a matter of disposition, no doubt. Many people are so constituted. The possession of what they have longed for and intensely desired, leaves them with the sensation of having been duped and imposed on. You have obtained what you desired, no doubt, but there is an undefinable something wanting, impossible to describe. "It is nothing" said Joseph Prud'homme "and it is much!" In any case it is enough to imbue one's life with a feeling of melancholy and vague regret.

Now that she was his wife, the Countess appeared in quite another character. She had always the look of a fashionable woman of the world, this striking beauty, which distinguished her in a marked manner. But Arthur had become accustomed to this, and the social triumphs which she so easily gained, did not give him that unalloyed pleasure, which he had formerly experienced.



It seemed to him that she was too eager for admiration, and greedy of conquest.

It did not seem to him that these triumphs were very remarkable. It is true that men seemed struck on first seeing her, and could not find themselves in her immediate vicinity without making eyes at her in a way which made them look supremely ridiculous. They paid her compliments of the most florid description; and made speeches that would have disgusted an opera dancer, and unworthy of a school boy.

Yet she swallowed it all greedily.

He began to suspect her of being too vain; and in a manner that displayed a decided want of intelligence.

It was all very well to pose for being a goddess out of doors, when arrayed in one of Worth's costumes! But at home, in a wrapper, seated at this damned "Beggar my Neighbor," where were the qualities which made her such a success in the ball room? It was the very devil! There was something wanting, but what he could hardly say.

Besides, all these little dissipations were very



different from the "High Life" which he had so fondly looked forward to. This life he was leading, too much resembled that awful humdrum existence from which he had fled in such terror. The mistake appeared a very grave one, a snare and a delusion. So he did not quite appreciate the beauties of the Oberland, and hoped always for the middle of September, when Paris would be again Paris, and he would once more return to the old habits which suited him so well.

While waiting for this ardently hoped-for day, he wandered about unceasingly, passing from one glacier to another, crossing and re-crossing the lakes, and sleeping at Berneroff, Swirsteroff, and all the other Lucerneroffs, of the thirteen cantons.

A beautiful trip, however, and a very beautiful country were it not that in the boats, hotels, or diligence, it was impossible to avoid coming in contact with those insupportable Germans, who eat with their fingers, and English, displaying the characteristic rudeness of their country.

One beautiful morning in August, the young



couple were resting in their hotel at Rigi-Kulm, up in the heights, about two thousand feet in the air. As it happened the weather was superb, and they had had the pleasure of being suddenly awakened, by a most terrifying row, about four o'clock in the morning, in order to see the sun rise on the summit of the mountains.

One singular habit they have, peculiar to that place alone. At a certain moment the waiters at the hotel ring a deafening bell, and go from door to door, giving resounding raps for the purpose of announcing that the curtain is about to be lifted on this truly beautiful scene.

It is thoughtful on their part, but one's first experience is rather alarming. You feel persuaded that the house must be on fire.

Then everyone makes haste to get up, and as it is only with the intention of going to bed again, any garment that happens to be convenient is donned. The greater number manage to get hold of their clothing, but others, afraid to miss the sight, envelop themselves with the counterpane, the curtain, or



even the sheet, and hurry to the staircase, in order to arrive at the terrace, on which is constructed a light scaffolding, which arises behind the two hotels of this place; the sole buildings, apart from the indispensable post-office, which they have dared to erect on this gigantic sugar loaf.

This mixed crowd, uncombed, with eyes swollen from want of sleep, muffled up without pretension—indeed a little pretension would not be amiss!—forms a picturesque group which is not displeasing....the first time!

For Arthur, who had passed a week there, this matutinal entertainment had lost its charm, and he would willingly have descended from these lofty spheres if his wife had consented. But a singular attraction detained her there. She experienced, she said, an extraordinary feeling of buoyant happiness, quite unknown before, and without joking, she felt herself brought into closer communication with the angels.

“My soul expands,” she kept repeating, “and I do not want to leave the Rigi until I have witnessed a storm, so that once



during my life, I may inhale the breath of the of the tempest!"

"It is useless to argue on tastes and colors," says the proverb, and since it was not yet the middle of September, Arthur allowed her to indulge her fancy. Drag through the weary days there, or at Lucerne, Alpnach, Alterfi, Witsnau, etc., it was all the same to him.

This particular morning, he had a regular fit of the blues. He had left his room, and within a short distance from the hotel, he had seated himself on the ground, hugging his knees in his arms and gazing vacantly on the panorama spread before him. Sometimes a steamboat, furrowing the lake of Quatre-Cantons, would attract his attention, but nothing more exciting than this broke the intense silence which reigned around him at this altitude. Not a bird, not even the sound of leaves rustling in the wind; nothing but a vast extent, a void, silent gulfs all around.

Suddenly the sound of a piano, coming from the hotel, awoke him from his reverie. The piano is an ungrateful instrument I allow, yet under the circumstances, he enjoyed listening



to this particular music. It was not anything from the grand masters, nothing of Wagner, above all, not Berlioz! But Arthur had enough of classical music! Inez did not admit of any other, and sometimes between two "Beggar my Neighbors," she did not even hesitate to attack Joncières.

One evening, he surprised her reading the opera of Dimitri, with the music upside down. To tell the truth, it went just as well!

The unknown musician whom Arthur was listening to, played a very different style of music. He could not have told at first, whether it was Offenbach, Hervé or Lecocq; but it pleased him! There was a tune in it, a rythm, very well played; in fact, a melody. There was something to understand; not a conglomeration of incomprehensible notes. It was altogether charming, gay, and inspiring.

Presently a young, fresh voice broke out on the stillness of the morning air, and Arthur recognized some words, which he was mistaken in supposing were those of Hervé, Lecocq; or Offenbach; it was simply a fragment from the "*Pre aux Clercs.*"



In spite of himself, he turned his eyes towards the window from which these delightful sounds proceeded. A moment later, the music ceased and a young girl appeared at the casement.

"It is singular," said Arthur to himself, "but it seems to me I have seen that face before."

Nothing could exceed the smiling happiness of this young girl's expression, which the clear light of the morning brightened up deliciously. It was not a regal style of beauty, no; but the freshness of early youth, the matchless grace of a young girl just emerging into womanhood.

Her hair, arranged carelessly, brought out in relief the rosy tints of a complexion exquisitely pure. Her look was happy and full of gay tenderness. Her rounded arms, and finely formed hands, were displayed under the loose sleeves of a light morning dressing gown, and her shoulders and bust would have delighted the soul of a sculptor. Ah, what a delightful young girl! Yes, nature, when she chooses, turns out beautiful specimens!



"Certainly," said Arthur to himself, "I have seen that face before!"

Shortly after, a young man in traveling costume, with every appearance of wealth about him, came out of the hotel, and lighted a cigar.

From his present position, Arthur could not distinguish his features, but what he did see, was a very pretty scene, and very pleasant for those who played their parts.

The young woman, leaning out of the window, called to the new comer, who went joyously up to greet her. A little argument followed. Then, the young tourist climbed up, the young girl bent forward at the risk of falling out of the window, and gave him a kiss, after which they looked at each other for a moment and then laughed heartily together.

"One more!" said the young man.

"Greedy boy!" said the pretty stranger.

Upon which she shut down the window, when the young tourist, turned in the direction where Arthur was sitting.

"Anatole!" cried he recognizing him.



“Fandansec!” said the other, coming to him with both hands extended, and grasping his warmly.





## CHAPTER V.

### COMMONPLACE LIFE.

After the first moment of joyful recognition, Arthur said to his friend:

“Ah! by the by, who is that young person with whom you rehearsed the part of Romeo on a small scale?”

“You saw what took place?”

“Everything!”

“Ah!” said Anatole, “I am covered with confusion, as with a garment. You must have laughed at me?”

“Certainly not!”

“Oh! nonsense! You must have found that sort of thing rather commonplace, not to say low!....”

“Not that, on my word!”

“What would you have, my dear fellow? One must bow to the inevitable! You are ‘De



Fandasec,' I am simply 'Peignard.' Your ancestors fought for the Holy Sepulchre, and mine, if I had any, have in the most plebeian fashion, sold fustion in a dusty shop; in short, everything about you savors of the bloated aristocrat, while I, grandson of a mechanic, only enfranchised since the Reign of Terror, have been forced to restrain my clownish appetites, and bow meekly to the commands of my superiors. Well, old man, in spite of the friendship with which you honor me, I feel the difference that exists between us. Are you the one to look with indulgent eyes on such a boyish trick? It merely excites your pity. And what do you think of my accomplice?"

"Once again, nothing that you would not like to hear. But do tell me who she is!"

"You did not recognize her?"

"Wait a moment! The Admiral's niece?"

"Precisely!"

"Aglaé?"

"Yes; Aglaé, my wife, as you doubtless are aware."

"Just so! I had quite forgotten."

"Look here," said Anatole, "that is what



takes away from all the romance of this scene, she is simply my wife. My dear fellow, my wife. Is this sufficiently middle class, sufficiently commonplace? And to think that at one time you thought of marrying her yourself! Can you imagine Arthur de Fandasec, in love with a person so easily amused? And again, that which shows my inferiority, my hopeless vulgarity, is that it amuses me as much as it does her. Worse still! It appeals to me, makes me love her all the more, in fact, I find her adorable, and I simply worship my own wife!"

"She has grown uncommonly pretty," said Arthur, a little absently.

"Ah! she is no beauty, but she has greatly improved. Last year she was at an age when young girls rarely look their best, and marriage has hastened the transformation. And then, she knows how to dress becomingly, and not to bundle herself up, as she did when fresh from the convent. But she cannot be named in the same breath with your wife, a world-renowned beauty, superb and magnificent, a queen in every respect; fit to be an empress!"



“She sings very well, however, your Aglaé?”

“You were listening, just now?”

“I had that pleasure, and enjoyed it very much.”

“You are too indulgent! She has undoubtedly made progress, and her taste has improved, according as her voice has gained in power and purity of tone. And then her newly awakened affections, and the happiness consequent on a marriage sanctified by love, has imparted an amount of expression to her voice, which was before wanting. But you see all the attempts as yet: Hérold, Gétty, Boïkl-dieu, Rossini, Verdi, old-fashioned style; worse than that, Auber! At the most, she attempts Gounod, and certain pieces of Mozart's. But, go and ask her to play something from *Tanhauser*, from *Lohengrin*? Never! alas! The poor child has not a sufficiently exalted soul to attain to these sublimities. To give you an idea of her capabilities! Lately, she began to study *Le Roi de Lahore*. My dear fellow, I implored her to stop! It was enough to drive one frantic. And the most amazing thing about her is, that instead of thinking she could



not comprehend this masterpiece, she declares it to be a composition both bald and poverty stricken.

“And so Arthnr, you can imagine yourself married to a person who holds such heretical doctrines? She never wearies me, because I am an insignificant nobody, and this music of the new school sends me to sleep. But you!.... you who are daily regaled by the countess, with the astonishing compositions of the great master at Padeloup! You, who float about in those harmonious waves of harmony invoked by German genius. How would you feel were you condemned to listen to the *Pre aux Cleres*, *La Favorite*, *Robert-le-Diable*, *Les Huguenots*, *Le Trouvere*, *Guillaume Tell*, and other musical trifles of the same style, when the countess can scarcely condescend to sing a morsel from *Aide*! Good enough for me,” said Anatole, in finishing. “Good enough for a person of common origin, married for worldly considerations, to a young girl of her limited capacity!”

Arthur had a singular impression while list-



ening, which gave him a feeling somewhat akin to anger.

At the same time, all that Anatole said was very near the truth. Yes, Anatole was of very ordinary extraction, while he, Arthur, was descended from a long line of illustrious ancestors; the Countess was possessed of rare sculptural beauty, while Aglaé would not have made more than a pretty sketch. Also Inez would undertake to render without hesitation, the most obscure and profound German masterpieces, when Aglaé would not dare do anything beyond the light elegancies of the French school. But all the sublime qualifications of the Countess he knew by heart, and had long ceased to relish, while the humble charms of the Vice-Admiral's niece, seemed to him the most desirable rarities.

Certainly the comparison which Anatole had made between the two women, ought to have been very flattering to Arthur, and yet, he kept saying to himself, that he had judged too quickly, and trusted too much to appearances. The congratulations with which he had overwhelmed him, had given him a sensa-



tion analogous to that which one experiences when taking a bite of an unripe lemon. And in spite of all, Arthur kept drawing comparisons inwardly.

To himself he could afford to be frank? Well! *Lohengrin*, *Tanhauser*, *le Roi de Lahore*, simply drove him wild. The greatness of soul possessed by Inez, had an irritating effect on his nerves. As to her Olympian style of beauty, a little of it went a great way, particularly as he had not been long left in ignorance how much the appliances of Art had to do with it. On her toilet table there was an array of cosmetics, pastes and beautifiers that was simply astonishing. The laboratory of the alchemist was nothing to it.

Aglaé, on the contrary, was pure and fresh as a wild rose, and lovely in herself, with nothing beyond the grace with which her eighteen summers had crowned her, the whole probably rendered more fascinating by an innocence that would have routed Jupiter himself.

And to think that it had only depended on his own choice to become the husband of this



fresh young goddess! And to watch the moral and physical developments, which Anatole had so graphically described.

Why the devil hadn't he the sense to think of it then? Oh! the hateful influence exerted over a man when he has one idea, and that a bad one, fixed in his mind! He had formed his opinion of these two women simply from outward appearances, and it was only of late that he had discovered how much he had erred.

And yet, he had another inward confession to make. The predilection of the Countess for "grand music," had not inspired him with unqualified delight, even at this period, that is to say, when the one idea which took possession of all his faculties was to rescue her from the Count.

He had never failed to applaud; but how many times had he been obliged to take a turn in the conservatory to prevent himself falling dead asleep!

And the eternal "Beggar my Neighbor." To think that he took a savage delight in disturbing the Count in the middle of the game which



he had commenced with his wife! It is true, he could always find some pretext for pressing the Countess' foot under the table!

"Ah! bye the bye, does Aglaé play "Beggar my Neighbor?" he asked Anatole.

"No;" replied the other. "You have had an opportunity of judging. We have other ways of amusing ourselves."

And poor Fandansec, without making more inquiries, could not help pitying himself, and came to the conclusion that he had made a gigantic mistake, and had sacrificed the substance for the shadow!

A bell announced the hour for breakfast.

"We will meet again," said Arthur.

"Excuse me," replied his friend, but Aglaé does not like the table-d'hôte. We have our meals served in our own room; breakfast, particularly, is much more agreeable in this manner, as we need not dress for the occasion. It costs more, of course, but we can do as we like, dawdle over our dessert with our elbows on the table, and say all the foolish things we choose, which would appear in doubtful taste, outside strict privacy. Besides, the price, you



know, need not cost us a thought. Apart from Aglaé's income, the Admiral has been very generous, and told us to spend money freely. He wishes it, and we gratify him! A strange sort of man, truly!

This came like a thunderbolt upon Arthur. The purchase of the property in Geneva had reduced his income considerably, and he had to reflect seriously before indulging in any little extravagance.

As Anatole held out his hand before returning to his wife, Arthur said:

"Well, old fellow, since chance has brought us together again, we shall meet frequently, I hope. It would be a capital idea to make an excursion together through this beautiful country. Tell me, at what hour would it be most convenient for you to present your wife to Madame de Fandansec? She knows her slightly, I think, and I can answer for it, will be charmed to see her again.

Anatole seemed slightly embarrassed at first, then seeing Arthur look surprised, with a slight look of annoyance on his face, he smiled frankly,



and holding out his hand again with a little friendly movement:

“My dear fellow,” said he, “you are too much a man of the world not to understand a hint, so I need not offer empty excuses. Old friends like ourselves can speak to each other without reserve. You will have no difficulty in comprehending matters just as they are, I am sure.”

“Difficulty!” said Arthur, struck with a presentiment that something disagreeable was about to happen. “What difficulty do you allude to?”

“Damn it all, old man, the difficulty of establishing friendly relations between our wives.”

“And where, then, is the difficulty?”

“Look here, Arthur, let us speak to each other frankly!”

“As frankly as you choose!”

“You will not be offended?”

“I will not be offended. Indeed, why should I be?”

“You, no! because you know the world, and have liberal ideas. But another, a man with restricted ideas....”

“For the love of heaven!” cried Arthur, “do



speak out! What do you mean? Is my family not good enough that you should hesitate to present your wife to mine? Explain yourself!

"Nothing of the kind! Apart from the superiority of her position, your wife's age entitles her to expect that Aglaé should make the first visit—if any intimacy could be possible between them."

"That cannot be, then?" said Arthur.

"My good friend, you forget that Aglaé and I are nothing more nor less than common citizens...."

"Well, then?"

"Well, then, you know how ridiculously punctilious the middle class are about certain positions." "Ah! if we only belonged to the higher classes, to the old aristocracy, or even the new, by Jove! there would not be the slightest difficulty. They practice a morality apart, as is becoming to the upper ten. But in our commonplace world, I need not inform you, and you know how much I deplore the fact, such situations are stupidly regarded as being equivocal."

"Ah! but...."



“Let me finish, Arthur. my good fellow; what the devil! one is either a friend or not! Well then, I regret it; but a young woman of the middle class, like Aglaé, simply a ‘Madame Peignard’ could not receive in her drawing-room, or at her table, or at her country house,—a magnificent seat! You’ll see it one day—in in one word, could not be on friendly terms with a person who had eloped!”

“And, certainly,” added he, without stopping to remark the consternation of his friend, “and certainly, I feel more than anyone else, how unjust and ridiculous these prejudices are. But what can I do? I cannot of myself reform the narrow-minded opinions of the world to which I belong. They might be guilty of rudeness to your wife, and I should feel outraged and annoyed. At the worst, if I was sure no one would surprise us, I might induce Aglaé—she is very indulgent to my fancies,—to ask you both to breakfast with us one day. Only it would have to be strictly private; but it will take some time to prepare to pave the way, to....”

“Enough! Am I dreaming; have I just ar-



rived from the Congo?" cried Arthur excitedly. "I have fallen from the clouds, that is certain. Ah! indeed, and where are there any, among the most straight-laced people in the world, who could see anything equivocal, in the position of Madame de Fandansec? Is she not my wife? Are we not married? Are we....?"

He stopped short, speechless with astonishment at the hearty laugh with which Anatole greeted this sally.

"Yes," said he 'the divorce?' Your marriage? ....What an original idea! How amusing! You alone would have thought of making such an escapade. 'Madame Caverlet,' yes, yes! I know all about it. The best thing I ever heard of, on my honor!"

"Amusing?" cried Arthur. "Not at all; on the contrary, nothing could be less amusing, unfortunately! I am married, my good fellow, really married! I will go and get my papers."

He rose to go, but Anatole stopped him, still laughing.

"Don't give yourself unnecessary trouble.



I don't doubt you. But, Arthur, my good fellow, where will you find anyone in our class to admit that the position Madame Inez occupies with regard to you, is a strictly regular one, while the Count d'Aldaïa is still living? It is not reasonable. She is legally divorced, I admit it. You have married her, all that is understood, but, this only holds good in Switzerland! Nowhere else. Where is the priest, who would consent to bless your union? Where are those on the same footing with Aglaé for instance, who would receive in their homes the divorced wife of the Count d'Aldaïa? Take Inez to England, Germany, Belgium, Holland, Sweden, to the United States—wherever divorce is legally admitted, and try to gain a footing in society? Here, even in this protestant Switzerland, where your marriage has been celebrated, try it! You will soon see what obstacles you will have to overcome. It is not only the text of the law which holds good; there are customs which have to be observed. And although she has become Madame de Fandansec, she still remains nothing more or less than 'divorced;'



that is to say, a person outside the pale of society, one apart, and to sum it all up—in a doubtful position?”

“All the more reason that here, in France,” added Peignard, “among our middle class people, where divorce is not approved of, why the companionship of those who seek for and obtain this emancipation, is to be avoided, inasmuch as they are supposed to set an evil example. Truly it is not to a man, whose ancestors had the glory of succumbing to the itch in Palestine, who have bravely plundered, violated, robbed and massacred all that came in their way—for the glory of the ‘Most High’ to be sure—that it becomes me to cite the opinions of a socialist. Commonplace, low-class ideas, doubtless, and I beg you to excuse me; but at the same time, they are ideas imbibed at the mother’s breast!”

An hour had almost elapsed since they began this somewhat lengthened discussion, and Aglaé came to the window and reminded her husband that breakfast was waiting. “Everything will be cold,” she called out.



He blew her a kiss, and holding out his hand to Arthur:

“Let my frankness,” said he to him, “prove the depth and devotion of my friendship. Good-bye!”

Without waiting for an answer, he went, or rather flew, to rejoin his pretty wife.

For a long time Arthur remained as if stunned from a sudden blow, fighting desperately against the impressions which Anatole had sought to convey. He refused to agree with him, feeling all the more irritated because of an inward voice which kept repeating in a sort of refrain:

“He is right!.... a thousand times right!....”

In recognizing the justice of Anatole’s criticisms, he was forced to acknowledge, that he had let himself be duped like an ordinary schoolboy; and had acted like a veritable ignoramus. A disagreeable confession to have to make to one’s self!

Like many others in a similar difficulty, he preferred to work himself up into a rage, against the world in general, and the Countess in particular.



What an amiable expression he wore, when he joined her at the breakfast table! Everything about her irritated him. Had she powdered and painted successfully this morning? And what a singular costume she wore! She had evidently sworn to be mistaken for a "co-cotte!" It was bad enough when she was only the Countess d'Aldaïa! But she was now Madame de Fandansec! And she honored him by dressing in such a way, that her husband had the appearance of being—that which he was not—if you please!

In the afternoon the two young couples met face to face. The men went through the ceremony of lifting their hats.

"Surely I am not mistaken," asked Inez. "Is not that your good friend Anatole?"

"The same!" replied Arthur, drily.

"And this person on his arm? I recognize her: Aglaé, the niece of the Vice Admiral?"

"The same!" repeated the young man, clenching his hands.

"Ah! indeed, the young girl you threatened to marry, naughty fellow," pressing his arm with a pretended feeling of jealousy.



Ah! can anything be more unpleasant than affectionate overtures, from the woman you no longer love!—who always succeeds in making the most irritating remarks? Arthur was choking with annoyance. It would have relieved him to burst into a torrent of expletives against the lovely being, who hung so heavily on his arm at this moment.

He kept glancing at his friend's wife, and envy, pale envy, entered his soul. How she had changed, this Aglaé! Ah, how gracefully she moved! And in what a pretty manner she kept step with her husband, clinging so lovingly to his arm, her shoulder against his, merging her own being so completely into his. What a simple dress she wore! So suited to her fresh young beauty, which had not yet made the acquaintance of rouge or pearl powder; the lines of her figure, so absolutely natural in their full, graceful beauty; her youth, that admirable and fascinating youth, which possesses a charm art cannot supply!

In spite of every effort to the contrary, Arthur kept recalling the scene enacted at the window in the morning.



"Greedy boy," Aglaé had said.

He heard her again, and shivered at the remembrance of the tender inflection of her voice.

Then some of the remarks made by Anatole on the subject of the Countess would recur to his memory.

"Apart from her position," he had said, "your wife's age entitles her, etc."

Her age! Well, yes, her age; what was it?

The Countess had owned to thirty years. Everyone knows what that means. And, supposing she was only thirty, that made her still seven years older than Arthur.

He knew it, certainly. Also when signing some papers, she had been questioned on the subject.

"What has that to do with it?" She had said.

And now that his feelings had undergone a change on this subject, now that he had recalled the words of the mayor when he cemented the ties which bound them together: "She is yours, my dear sir, and none other's. altogether and completely belonging to you;"



now it seemed to him that the difference of age did count for something.

Something! But what? Can any one say? Does any one know? A mere matter of feeling, impossible to explain or define.

In all confidence, we must state that this woman, this incomparable Inez, for whom formerly he would have gone through fire and water, had become to him an object of abhorrence. She was a burden to him, and her very appearance threw him into a state of nervous irritability. How had this happened? What combination of circumstances had led to this?

It will suffice, in the absence of a better explanation, merely to state it as a fact. It was, alas! undeniable, whatever she did, whatever she said, she only succeeded in aggravating and annoying him. He made use of every legitimate pretext to get away from her, but the step of his life did not afford much comfort to the poor devil. However far apart he was from Inez, he could not banish her from his mind.

Sometimes, seated on some solitary rock, indifferent to the beauties of the surrounding



country, which in fact he hardly saw, he would say to himself:

“It is most astonishing, almost scandalous, and appears as if it could happen only to me, that a wife can be taken away from her legitimate possessor, without any interference from him. I have read a great many romances on this subject, for novelists have always this idea in their heads. I have seen heaps of articles, written on this theme, and still more I have followed the reports of a hundred cases of this kind and always, always! in fiction, as well as in real life, the husband appeared, at least appeared to dispute the legal possession of his wife. Sometimes it was a duel that took place, or a law suit, but always something rises up between the lovers, to separate them forever.

“But for me, it is just my luck! I am sick of this Count d’Aldaïa, this wily old fox, who was to carry things with such a high hand! Well, but where is he? What is he thinking about? How does it happen that he has not yet discovered us? Must I make known to him our



retreat by publishing it in the papers? It is incomprehensible!"

These reflections grew more intense, as the time for visiting his beloved Paris drew near.

"I venture to say he has exhausted himself hunting for us. Ah! I have hit it at last! And if he does not find us, it is because he does not wish to; for no one in the wide world could take less trouble to conceal our whereabouts than I do!"

One can imagine how mortified Arthur felt, while listening to Anatole's very plain speaking. But, thinking over it calmly, he did agree with him up to a certain point, although still nursing a feeling of annoyance! Worse still, a sensation of bitter envy had taken possession of him.

When he met Algaé, leaning on her husband's arm, he could not refrain from saying inwardly: "If I had only wished! This pretty wife would have been mine; I would have been the one to joke with her; it is to me she would have said: 'Greedy boy!' It would have been for my edification that she would sing all that she knows of Hérold, Rossini, Halévy, Auber. And now



see what I have lost! What an ass I was! What a confounded blockhead I have been!"

Vain regrets, but painful. On the other hand the time drew near when, his income being altogether insufficient to meet the extravagant demands of the Countess, he would be compelled to draw on his capital, if only for the purpose of installing themselves in Paris.

At last!—day to be remembered!—the middle of September arrived. On the sixteenth, at four o'clock in the morning, Arthur and the Countess took their seats in the train for Paris.

Thanks to telegrams, and orders given by letter, Arthur's old valet opened the door of the coupé in which they had traveled, took possession of their small packages, and led them to the carriage which was waiting for them.

The young man heaved a sigh of relief. It was happiness to return to Paris, even though he had only been a Parisian for a short time. These streets, these houses, pavements, omnibusses, even the policemen, were altogether delightful, and it cheered him up as nothing else could have done, to see them again. He



felt himself at home at once. "Thank God! I am here at last," said he.

During the last month of their stay in Switzerland, Arthur had escaped the wild excitement of "Beggar my Neighbor," under the pretense of furnishing designs for the decorations of their new apartment—What did I say apartments? His hotel, if you please. It was indeed a hotel, a small one, to be sure. *Chaussée de la Muette*, at Passy, so beautifully shaded, that mushrooms sprang up at the foot of the trees.

He had rented it from after having often seen a photographic sketch of the house and grounds. It was small, but a very cozy, charming little nest. When Inez descended from the carriage and entered, her face darkened. Good heavens! this was very different from her spacious and superb villa in the *Rue Balzac*. And then the stables; where were they? Not any stables! And the bath-room on the ground floor. What! a tin-lined bath-tub. At the villa her bath was of white marble! Ah, my God! what a kitchen! And the pantry? there was not even a pantry!



Why, the drawing-room had no boudoir communicating with it; no smoking or billiard room. A little nest, my lady!

"A shelter," replied she; "a mere shelter."

It was certainly most artistically arrayed. The upholsterers had followed out Arthur's designs very cleverly. Each piece of furniture was the reproduction of some old style.

"Yes; but," objected the Countess, "the walls are papered!"

"At thirty francs the roll, my dear Countess."

"Over there we had hangings."

"Possibly," returned the young man, feeling wounded in his self-respect; "but they were not paid for."

Inez looked at him in astonishment, mingled with pity.

"What has that got to do with it?" said she, in a tone which cut short her husband's reply.

That could not affect her in any way, these unpaid bills,—a mere detail.

In fact, she found fault with everything, and her openly-expressed dissatisfaction only seemed to aggravate Arthur's feeling of regret.



The first few days of their arrival, however, passed smoothly enough. Both were anxious to re-plunge into the vortex of Parisian life, the "High Life" with which they had fallen into such terrible arrears. At the most, they breakfasted at home, but every evening was passed at the theater or opera. It was with feelings of profound satisfaction, that, after dining at Helder's or Durand's, they went to see Judic, or Théo and Daubray. Only Inez could not reconcile herself to the idea of returning in a cab. Before this, she had her horses! It was humiliating for her to drive round the lake in a hired carriage, like any common-place person.

One evening, after dining together alone, not without an interchange of rather sarcastic compliments, Arthur, dreading the re-appearance of "Beggar my Neighbor," pleaded headache and rose to go out alone.

"Where are you going?" asked Inez.

"To get some fresh air."

This explanation was sufficient, and committed him to nothing.

He went out, with no particular object in



view. All he desired was to feel himself free, to belong to himself as it were.

This need sometimes makes itself felt by newly married men, and, with some, it happens pretty frequently. It is a sort of holiday they like to indulge themselves in, and once safely out in the street, an enormous weight seems to be lifted from off them. They tread lightly, not to say jauntily, inhale the air more vigorously, and regard surrounding objects with renewed interest. I have even seen some, who yielding to a feeling of rare exhilaration, cocked their hat on one side, and humming a little air to themselves, kept nodding their heads in time, like a Chinese Mandarin.

This is what Arthur did. After prancing along the pavement for a little time, it suddenly occurred to him that this was the fashionable night for the circus. A cab was passing; he hailed it, telling the driver to take him there, secretly hoping to meet with some of his old chums. This tête-à-tête with his wife had lasted such an interminable time! Besides, for her sake, it was in a measure, his



duty to renew, and should the occasion offer, form some new acquaintances.

The moment he entered, he recognized some half dozen of the ladies among the performers, who saluted him with friendly smiles, and later on, during the interlude, they wanted to know what had become of him.

A little surprised that they knew nothing about his escapade, he briefly informed them. This was not exactly the class of people he wished to open his doors to, neither would they be particularly anxious to visit, where they would be obliged to conform to the usages of polite society.

Finding himself alone, after the performance was over, under the huge trees of the Avenue Gabriel, he began to reflect on the singular position in which he had placed himself. On one side, respectable people hesitated to acknowledge his wife, and the others would not adapt themselves to her mode of life.

At first, when Anatole had declined the honor of presenting Aglaé to the ex-Countess d' Aldaïa, he had not attached any importance to his remarks. He had merely thought :



“He is a fool, a narrow-minded idiot!”

But since his return, he had sent cards to people in good position, at whose houses he had always met with warm welcome, and in acknowledgment, he had received invitations, which gave him cause for serious reflection.

The cards sent by him, bore the names: “Monsieur and Madame de Fandansec.”

The invitations sent in return, were simply to “Monsieur Arthur de Fandansec” alone.

“It is the very devil!” said he to himself at last.

He thought and re-thought over the matter, pacing sadly up and down the avenue, comparing the present with the past.

He had been so happy as a bachelor! Popular, sought after by people of all classes, it was with difficulty he could respond to all the invitations heaped upon him. His income of twenty thousand pounds, amply sufficed for all the luxuries, fancies, and even follies, he chose to indulge in! He had done as others did, even gambled a little; once, how well he remembered it, at the club....

Of course! there was his club! Was he still



a member? Yes! Before leaving, he had written to the president, sending in his resignation. But, according to club law, the president had refused to accept his resignation, so that although granted unlimited leave, he was placed among the category of honorary members, until it pleased him to return to Paris.

In another moment he had hailed a cab.

"Four, Place de l' Opera," he said to the driver, with that tone of the man of society, which formerly distinguished him.

No driving was sufficiently rapid to satisfy his impatience. He experienced a feeling of almost boyish delight. The club! His club! He was saved. What joy and happiness it would be to meet all those "fellows" there; "choice spirits" friends, in fact. He was not quite sure of their names, it is true, but still they were on the most intimate terms. Had they not played any amount of pranks together? Improvised suppers, engaged brakes, packed with champagne, to go to the races! Had they not played pitch and toss together? Ah! these jolly fellows; he would soon see them all. Half past eleven



o'clock ; he was just in the nick of time ! Some would be returning from the opera or theatre, others had taken their "friends" to some sequestered retreat on the Boulevard, while another had just arrived on the train by which he had run away from Trouville, Dieppe, or from Tréport. Brandy and soda would be the order of the day, stories would go round of the upper ten and the "commonplace" people, and the inveterate gamblers, while waiting the hour for baccarat, would be staking two or three hundred louis, on a quiet game of *écarté*. It would be immense !

What would they say on seeing him back again ? Would they not cheer ?

"Make haste, driver, if you wish for a tip."

His feelings were beyond description, as he passed the outer gate, where he had been so frequently applauded, by his old friends, for the skill he displayed in driving his mettlesome pair of ponies, and the style with which he brought them to a standstill, and threw the reins to the groom.

The porter, Monsieur Jean, good old fellow, obliging and anxious to please, did not at first



know him, and was about to prevent him passing, when suddenly recognizing who he was:

“Monsieur de Fandansec! I beg your pardon, sir, I am sure you will excuse me, but it is such a long time since we have seen you here. And then, sir, you are not looking quite so well; thin and pale, yes, sir, a good deal paler. You will excuse my freedom, Monsieur de Fandansec!”

And, solicitous to please, he hastened to save Arthur the trouble of ringing the bell for the lift. Afterwards, on returning to his wife:

“It is Monsieur de Fandansec, by Jingo! How he has fallen off! He looks ten years older, poor unfortunate young man.”

Arthur was obliged to give his card in the ante-room, the waiters having all been changed. But as soon as it became known who he was, the manager ran to welcome him.

“During your absence, sir,” said he, “a package and several letters were left for you. But, as you did not leave your address, we put them in the drawer where you were in the habit of leaving your evening suit.”



If there had been only letters Arthur would have attached little or no importance to the fact, but the package awoke his curiosity. What could it be? Who would be likely to send him a package, and what could it possibly contain?

“Thank you,” said he. “Give me the key of the drawer.”

Without losing a moment, he hastened to the dressing room.

It was not a very roomy apartment. There were two marble wash stands, with taps for hot and cold water. Soap, comb, brushes, etc., were provided, also a shampooing apparatus and perfumed spray dispensers.

All round the room, were wardrobes stained in imitation of old oak, each bearing its own particular number.

Arthur's number was seventeen. He opened it quickly. Three dress-shirts, that had grown yellow with age, lay a long side of an evening suit—plain as perfect taste could dictate—trousers, with a band of silk, and waistcoat with very open front.



What happy memories this elegant garb called forth!

Then this dozen of handkerchiefs, with embroidered monograms! And these patent leather dress boots! And there, carefully wrapped up in perfumed paper, were still two pairs of straw-colored kids, redolent of iris powder, prepared by Guerlain himself!....

Meanwhile, he did not waste time. He quickly took possession of the letters, but, before opening them, he examined the handwriting. It is a singular mania, but since we all indulge in it, no blame can be attached to him. There was nothing of importance in these letters: pressing invitations from those very houses, where now he would be received if unaccompanied by his wife.

He crushed them up with a feeling of contempt.

There was still the parcel: what could it be, so carefully wrapped up and sealed? He tore off one wrapper after another of tissue paper. It must be something of value or at least something demanding careful handling. Curiosity got the better of him. Another moment,



and he tore it open, discovering a small frame in Russian leather, ornamented with a monogram. A silver spring projected; he pressed it, and discovered a colored photograph under a glass cover, in a frame of blue velvet, surmounted by a Count's coronet.

In one corner he discovered some writing:—

*“To Gustave, who knows so well*

*“His*

*“Inez.”*

“Gustave?” Why Gustave? and why send him the portrait—to him, Fandansec, whose name was Arthur?”

Ah! some revenge of the Count's, perhaps.

A very pitiful revenge, and most contemptible. But no; that could not be. The Count's name was Antonio! There was no similarity between the names of Gustave and Antonio. Well, then, whose could it be?

One can imagine what a vast field of conjecture was opened up by the receipt of this parcel. An enigma which, when solved, promised bitter disappointment.

One could hardly credit it. But after the first moment of blind rage, a sort of vague hope



appeared to possess him, and exercised an exhilarating effect on his spirits. It seemed to him that he was now provided with a weapon, or, to put it less tragically, a means of escape.

It may be all very well to elope with a lady, who, necessarily, being a lady, was legally bound to the man who was her husband; and it is to be hoped, if only out of mere delicacy of feeling, that he remained true to her, even after the first glow of enthusiasm had cooled down. She has sacrificed her rank, the opinion of the world, in fact everything. The least he can do is to offer her what equivalent lies in his power. But if there is a "Gustave" in the question, that throws a very different light on the subject.

"I know perfectly well what she will say: Excuse me, that happened before we met; why should you be so susceptible on the subject?"

And it would appear to her as altogether illogical, as it was outrageous, to waste a thought on what had taken place so long ago.

But by Jove! She might say what she liked! Whether she chose to understand or not, whatever she might find illogical or unreasonable, it



was all the same to him, the fact remained! And Arthur discerned sufficient reason why their union should be, if not altogether dissolved,—unfortunately the civil authorities had put their veto on that—at all events, afford him a pretty good pretext for loosening on his side, any ties which might bind him too strictly, to this very indulgent wife of his.

Meanwhile, after cursing himself up hill and down dale, for the blind obstinacy with which he had pursued, without allowing himself time to reflect, this mad desire to run away with the Countess, he swore he would never again yield to a first impulse. Very quietly he replaced the portrait, and carefully locked the drawer, deciding not to think of it again, until the following day.

Having made up his mind finally on this point, he adjourned to the card-room.

He was doomed to disappointment even there. They scarcely noticed him. It was true baccarat had begun, and they were playing for very heavy stakes. With regular club goers, nothing counts on such occasions. Loss or gain. Nothing exists outside this pre-occupa-



tion; the house might be set on fire, they would not interrupt the game. At the most, one or two remarked:

“Hello! Fandansec.”

But no one asked where he had come from, what he had been about, whether he had returned for good, or whether he was only passing through. A very different reception from the hurrahs he had anticipated.

A doctor standing near him remarked:

“You have been ill?”

“I? no, doctor, never was better in my life.”

“You must have been ill, my dear fellow, any one can see it.”

“How?”

“By your face.”

“I look like a person who has been ill?”

“Yes; thin, eyes dull and sunken. You have been ill, it is evident.”

“Upon my word, that is putting it too strong.”

“Without your knowledge, of course; that often happens. Take care of yourself, my good fellow!”



"You are a nice specimen," said Arthur to himself.

At the same time he remembered that Jean, the porter, had said much the same thing. Was it possible he had changed so much?

He seated himself at the table. Some one who stood behind him, and had to reach over his shoulder to put down his stake, knocked against him with his elbow.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

"It is nothing," replied Arthur, turning round.

"What!" said the other, in a tone of surprise; "is it you, my dear fellow?"

"Swenska!" said Arthur, shaking his hand.

"I'll be hanged if I would have recognized you!" added the Prince.

"Oh! you only saw the top of my head."

"Precisely! Ah! your hair is getting thin, my dear boy; have you been ill?"

Arthur was struck with this coincidence, and his temper began to rise. If he returned home with this on his mind, he would be unable to sleep; so he decided to remain where he was. Cards would help to divert him, so he played.



At four o'clock in the morning, as he had lost not a little, he took the bank, hoping to redeem his fortune. But it was late; a good many of the winners had withdrawn from the table.

The Prince had lost pretty heavily, and wished to remain, while a friend of his tried to dissuade him, which led to a little dispute behind Arthur's chair.

"Don't play against your luck!" repeated the friend. "Besides, within the last few minutes, you played recklessly. Come home and go to bed!"

"Presently."

"Very well, then; good night."

"No! wait a moment. I will make two bets and then go with you, on my honor!"

The friendly adviser refused to listen, and left the room.

A moment later he came back with his overcoat and hat on.

"Come, now," he cried from the door, "you are going; it is stupid! Come at once, Gustave!"

"Gustave!"

At this name Arthur started. He suddenly



remembered that the prince had been an intimate friend of the Count's, and a frequent visitor at the Rue Balzac. He had even heard it whispered that the Count was jealous of him. And then, the prince had bought the entire villa as it stood, immediately after the disappearance of Inez!

And his name was Gustave?

Utterly bewildered, Arthur drew a seven on a five, although he had given a picture card to the ace, and a nine to the two; which caused a loss for him, on both sides, of thirty-nine thousand francs. This is what is called the "banker's coup."

Arthur, of course, ought to have been the winner by this classic coup. His sequence was according to rule, five, against both sides, which, in order to ask for a card, ought only to have Bacca, one, two, three, four, or five at the maximum. When Arthur, we repeat it, gave a picture card to the ace, which did not alter the stake of that side, a nine to the two, which lessened by one the original value of the other, the proper play then for the banker, was not to draw, since in keeping his five, he



risked at the most, to be equal with one of the sides.

However, he had drawn, and thus reduced himself to two

Those around could not understand it.

"He has lost his head!" they said one to the other.

The truth was, that he foresaw difficulties, and, without giving his attention to what was passing, although it was costing him so much, he muttered to himself:

"Gustave!" looking wildly around, sometimes at the table, and sometimes at the pallid countenance of the Prince, who, thanks to this last coup, was retrieving some of his previous losses, and appeared inclined to jeer Arthur.

At half past nine on the following morning, M. de Fandansec, left the club, minus the sum of seventy-six thousand francs.

His face looked a yard long, complexion green, hands clammy, linen discolored, clothes impregnated with the odor of stale tobacco, hair in disorder, and in addition to all this,



one of those racking headaches which seems to tear you all to pieces.

Furious, pitiful and ridiculous in his own eyes, he threw himself into a cab, gave his address at Passy, and sunk into a corner of the vehicle, two impressions appearing to predominate in his tortured brain.

One being:

“Gustave.”

And the other:

“And this is “High Life.”

At last, confounding one with the other, he sank into a state of half unconsciousness, murmuring with a sigh:

“If I had only known!”



## CHAPTER VI.

### THE TWO HUSBANDS OF MADAME INEZ.

When a man has committed a great blunder, distinctly acknowledged as such, and by dint of having to pay the costs of his folly, is constrained to own the disagreeable fact to himself, it happens that, according to the influences by which he is surrounded, or the mood in which he may happen to be, he either breaks the chains which bind him, sending every consideration to the devil, or, and this is the case most usually adopted, weakly succumbs to the inevitable and allows himself to float down with the tide, hoping, like the great Micawber, that something will turn up, to rescue him from the fruits of his own folly.

Arthur hesitated for a long time which of these two courses he should pursue. So long, indeed, that there was nothing left for him but to adopt the first expedient.



Like all unexpected blows, those which occur in private life have their decisive moments; but, if that decisive moment is lost, then everything is missed.

In Arthur's case, the opportunity had presented itself with this portrait, and with the autograph dedicating it to "Gustave." Another would not have hesitated; that very day, he would have placed it before the eyes of the ex-Countess, and demanded:

"What is this?"

And if she had taken refuge in excuses, by demanding in a still more imperious manner:

"No more subterfuge! In one word, what does it mean, clearly and distinctly, if you please?"

The least that could have happened would have been a scene, accompanied by tears, protestations, clenching of teeth, gaspings for breath, fainting fits, real or assumed, reproaches, defiances, etc. In one word, all that constitutes a complete programme in such a case, and which the poet so graphically describes as a cloud passing along the blue horizon of conjugal love.



Ah, well! What more could a man, determined to break with a woman, reasonably desire?

Any woman, however wanting in self-respect, would display indignation at having such a grave accusation brought against her. The looker-on, this superior being, of whom so much is said in novels, but who is never seen, the looker-on, I say, judiciously remarks, that the really guilty woman is the one to display the greatest amount of indignation. A circumstance all the more favorable. Is it not so? From being angry, she becomes aggressive, bringing accusations in her turn, heaping reproaches on his head, and loading him with invective.

Upon which, you can imagine him for yourself. This man, determined to sever the bonds that weigh so heavily upon him, assumes the dignity which is the natural appurtenance of one of the "Lords of Creation," and, rushing from the room with wild looks—not, however, forgetting to take his hat!—cries in a changed voice:



"Ah! let me leave this cursed spot, or something terrible will happen!"

And then a rush is made after him, a search is made!

This invariably succeeds; and, as you see, is not too complicated.

Arthur's inclinations, however, tended in the opposite direction. He was vacillating, and deficient in moral courage, and was always in dread of doing something that was not quite right. Of course, there had been a "Gustave;" but what "Gustave?" Before speaking of him, he would like to learn a few more particulars; to have some certainty as to who he really was; so many men were called "Gustave!"

Also, when tired of searching, he resolved to drive the Countess into a corner. It was too late to play the little farce described above. Irritated and annoyed at his own failure to discover anything more convincing about this "Gustave," he accepted the first excuse offered.

"Gustave?" said Inez in the most ingenuous manner. "He is my brother, my poor brother, who, when quite young, was a helpless witness of the Count's unwarrantable outrage;



my dear brother Gustave, the chosen confidant of all my sorrows, and who, on arriving at manhood wished to avenge the wrongs I had suffered, and with whom I had to exert my utmost influence to dissuade from such a course, before I could prove to him, that for the honor of our family, it was better to let matters rest as they were!....”

“And where then is this brother, of whom mention has never been made before?” asked Arthur.

“Probably in Oceanica,” replied the Countess. “At least, if he is not snowed up somewhere near the North Pole, for he is a daring navigator, whose ambition it is to discover the free passage beyond the frozen zone.”

Go and write to such an address, to discover the truth of what she said! Who could say whether this brother-in-law of his might not be frozen between two icebergs?

The only thing to do, was to appear to believe her. For some time Arthur still kept watch, not despairing of being able to surprise his wife, in some little act of deception.



Vain hope! Everything tended to confirm the truth of her statement.

Still clinging to his first supposition, Arthur brought the Prince to see Inez, thinking that sooner or later they would betray themselves. But whatever secret understanding may have existed between them, nothing happened to strengthen his suspicions.

Inez on her side, had renewed her acquaintance with the Baroness d' Iosk, and as was the case in former times, she came daily to see her "dear friend."

One evening when the Baroness had dined at Passy, and while she was employed in mixing a "gloria" for herself in the drawing-room, she said to the Countess:

"By the bye, dear, what news have you of your brother Gustave? Has he discovered the passage to the North Pole yet?"

It was true, then, and there really was a brother of that name!

Everything wears out in time, and this question of Gustave gradually dropped.

Still there was the fact of this portrait having been sent to Arthur at his club, which still



remained unaccounted for. According to the ex-Countess, it was purely a piece of villainy on the part of the Count d' Aldaïa, the underhand proceeding of a discarded rival; an unworthy vengeance; the act of an uneducated savage; of one beneath contempt, neither more nor less.

How unravel the truth from all this? There was mixed up with it, perhaps, a certain taint of foreign feminine duplicity, which one so instinctively distrusts; but it is so wearisome to be always on the watch! In the end, one becomes as it were, acclimatized to all these different temperatures, as one becomes accustomed to different situations, were they a hundred times equivocal.

Arthur ended by deciding that, for his own peace of mind, it was better to accept things as they were; and so far as appearances went, his dignity was saved.

Besides, he had so many other cares which weighed heavily on him! So many causes of anxiety, which kept him awake for hours tossing restlessly on his weary couch.

It was this, that however simple their style



of living might seem to the fair Inez, their expenses far exceeded his income. Every month Arthur had to intrench on his capital, and he was forced to think of the day when he would not have a penny to bless himself with!

For a long time past, this had been a source of endless anxiety, and tortured him to such an extent, that he became a victim to insomnia. This was followed by extreme prostration, and as some poor shipwrecked cast-away, paralyzed by cold, will allow himself to float helplessly to his doom, worn out by a hopeless struggle against such all powerful elements, he shut his eyes resolutely, and abandoned himself to the current, saying:

“So much the worse!”

Far from putting a curb on their extravagance, he rushed headlong into fresh expenses, and threw caution to the winds.

“Let us go it, this ‘High Life!’ A short life and a merry one, is the motto for those who have spent their all.”

He almost hailed poverty as a means of deliverance. Would this woman resign herself to it? Perhaps! No, never, in all her life!



What then? Would she leave him? For God's sake make haste then, and waste no more time!

He had conceived a strong prejudice against her, and she exasperated him to the last degree; he could not bear even to think of her.

Ah! why had these suspicions about Gustave, not been better founded? Why, oh why, had she not afforded him a good pretext for a separation? What was she afraid of? His anger? Ah! no indeed, he would have rejoiced with all his heart, and there and then, even if he had to sacrifice his watch, he would have taken the first train back to Arles, glad to take refuge in some corner of the chateau of Bicheterre, even including the penalty of listening to endless lectures.

Ah! Bicheterre! Ah! the Canoness! Ah! the peaceful repose to be enjoyed under the Aegis of his venerated ancestors! Ah! what a lost paradise!

But that was a dream; it was too much to hope for, too delightful, too good; it could never happen. No, his own idiocy, had condemned him to "High Life." You longed to



have a taste of it, my boy, and now you must drink the bitter cup to the dregs.

“High Life,” what a farce it all was! What was there in it worth having?

Looking at it philosophically, the sharpness of his sufferings enabled him to realize more clearly all the littleness and emptiness of this kind of existence. The club, cards, showy toilettes, suppers, the whole vocabulary *ad hoc*, races, steeple-chases, watering-places, seaside and roulette, Monte-Carlo, and the eternal Bordeaux of the Café Anglais, he had had enough of it, he turned sick at the remembrance of it all.

It was impossible to set himself free. It required an amount of energy, of which he was incapable.

It would necessitate his encountering the grand airs of the Countess d' Aldaïa, listening to her reproaches, struggling, disputing. Ah! horrors!

It seemed easier to him to run the gauntlet, and plunge headlong into the abyss towards which his first steps had hurried him.

One day in autumn, the Baron d' Iosk pro-



posed to go to Chantilly for the last race of the season.

The Baron had his four-in-hand that he drove in first-class style. The Baroness had a good appetite, but did not care to eat, unless she could drink; and had a rare talent for providing an *al fresco* lunch that would tempt the most rigid anchorite. The invitation was a tempting one.

"What do you think of it, Arthur?" asked the Countess.

"Who? I!" he replied. "You need not trouble yourself about my wishes in the matter. Drag me to Chantilly, or any other place, it is all the same to me. Decide for yourself. Get your dress ready, and as there will be something you will inevitably want, make haste and get it."

For some time past she had ceased to notice Arthur's fits of moodiness.

"How he has changed!" they remarked from time to time.

"Pay no attention to him, it is his nature. He is not fitted to be a man of the world; 'High Life' is too much for him."



"It is most singular," observed the baroness, "but he reminds me very much of the Count. He is growing very like him. His clothes seem to hang on him. His cheeks are hollow, his eyes heavy, and his hair is actually turning white. Ah! dear friend, how unfortunate for you."

It was Inez they pitied.

However that might be, they decided to go to Chantilly, and the Countess, who, like a woman, had declared at the last moment, that she had "nothing fit to wear,"—it is the accepted formula,—profited by the three days yet remaining before Sunday, to order herself a little costume, very simple, of course, but which could not fail to attract the notice of the betting ring.

A very select spot, this betting ring! All sportsmen, besides being stock brokers, jockeys, trainers, grooms, pimps, and card sharpers, and all impregnated with an odor of the stable, that was unmistakable.

Under the shade of a temporary awning, the descendants of the best families in France, and other countries, were mixed up with Parisian



jewelers, *cocottes*, actresses, broken-down gamblers, and blacklegs, forming a heterogeneous mass of excited bettors, shouting out the odds, and laying and accepting wagers on their favorites, in tones that made the air vibrate with the din:

“Three to one, bar one!”

“Two to one on the field!”

“Six to four against Frisette!”

“Five to four against Elastique!” etc., etc.

Frisette, Elastique, Reine de Souplesse, Baldaquin, are the names of the horses which are to run. There are others, upon which they bet furiously; but these are the favorites. In this very mixed mob, some English jockeys may be seen, with their orthodox peaked caps, on which perspiration and dust have traced marks of a rather grotesque design, walking their horses about the paddock, swearing in their own peculiar and barbarously disagreeable idiom.

Lower down the course, the petty tradesman smokes his rank two-penny cigar, and ogles the ladies in the grand stand, through his hired opera-glass. At the buffet, they crowd forward



to drink bottled Bass, or dry champagne. The *cocottes* ape the lady, and the ladies ape the *cocottes*; they flirt as much as they can; little dinners are organized in parties, at the Moulin-Rouge, and at Voisin, with a little *bac* to finish up with.

In passing, you hear slang terms, ribald jests, drunken oaths, loud laughs "which speak the vacant mind," and, high above the din, the voice of a flower girl, who never ceases to cry:

"Flowers for your button-hole, gents! Six-pence for my little bouquets!"

A very select spot, this betting ring! A promised land, where the student longs to show himself with his own chosen companions, as soon as he has passed his first step on the spring-board which will land him in the full swing of "High Life."

In the thickest part of the crowd, and looking over the heads of those surrounding him, stood the tall, Albinian figure of the Prince Swenska, betting heavily on every race. It was his forte; he gave the odds against all the horses. The system is well known, and, like



all betting systems, it has its risks; but the Prince come off well.

As the bell announced the first race, the betting ceased, and the Prince once more mingled with the crowd, and made his way to the grand stand.

"A rose, my Prince?" said the flower girl, stopping him.

"Don't bother me," replied Swenska. "They make my head ache."

"You can offer it to my old mistress!" boldly added the girl, insinuating a rose into his buttonhole.

The Prince looked at her.

"What!" said he, "is it you, Fulgence? You would not stay with me when I purchased the Villa d'Aldaïa. You wished to start in business for yourself, then?"

"Judge for yourself, Prince."

"Perhaps you have lost by it?"

"Bah! I have what I require, my lord. And then, you thought so much of my mistress, that I did it to discourage you."

The Prince, who had, perhaps, his own private reasons, smiled complaisantly.



"I have just seen her," said the flower girl. "She is still the same, imposing and royal, as she always was."

"Whom do you mean?"

"Whom? Why, Madame!"

"The Countess?"

"Madame de Fandansec, yes."

"She is here, at Chantilly; are you sure?"

"I have just seen her, seated in the front row of the grand stand, near the Baroness, while her husband passes his time between the betting ring and the buffet."

"The devil!" said the Prince, with some appearance of anxiety.

Suddenly leaving Fulgence, he hastened to where she had said the two ladies were seated.

He bowed to them, offered his rose to Inez, and asked where Arthur was to be found.

"Somewhere over there," replied the baroness. He came with us in the break, but the open air made him very thirsty, and he went in so strongly for champagne, that my husband advised him to take some seltzer."

The Prince made her a little sign to speak to her **privately**.



"What is the matter?" asked the Baroness, in a low voice.

"Make some excuse to get away from the Countess," replied Swenska, in the same tone.

"I have something serious to tell you."

"Wait a moment," she replied.

Presently, seeing Inez surrounded by a circle of youthful admirers, each one surpassing the other in their general get-up, she rose, and, taking the Prince's arm:

"I will return in a moment," said she to the Countess.

Then, after taking a few steps:

"What is it all about, Prince?"

"Just think, my dear Baroness. This morning as I was taking my ticket at the station, I heard some people talking loudly behind me, one of them pushed against me, and I turned around and recognized—whom? Guess!"

"How could I guess?"

"I will give you a thousand chances!"

"Do tell me at once!"

"The Count!"

"What Count? There are crowds of them here."



"Inez's first husband!"

"Aldaïa?"

"The same!"

The Baroness remained stupefied.

"Where was he going?" she asked, after a moment of shocked surprise.

"He was coming here!"

"To Chantilly?"

"He has a horse running. He has just purchased the stud of that Frankfort banker who became bankrupt in such a fraudulent manner, and whom they caught cheating at the club."

"Oh!" cried the Baroness, "what does this mean? But do continue, I beg of you, and tell me all you know. Did he speak to you?"

"He shook hands, American fashion, with me so heartily, that he almost dislocated my arm, and I could not avoid finishing the rest of the trip with him."

"He did not mention his wife or Arthur?"

"Not a word! That is what alarms me most. Major Berninii was with him, and both seemed to have lunched generously. The Count had engaged a coupé; and sandwiches, whisky, and cards were the order of the day.



“Ah! my God!”

“They drank and played during the whole journey. The Major was in a vein of luck—never in my life have I seen such a run of luck in *écarté*! With a sequence of eleven, he turned up the king at each deal. I even think that the second last time he marked it twice, by oversight, of course, so strong was the vein.

“At the same time that he was getting cleaned out of enormous sums, the Count gave me an account of what had happened to him, after he sold the villa.

“It had only been necessary to show himself at the mine, in order to quell the revolt, fermented by his overseer. Meeting him face to face at the entrance, the Count shot him dead by way of saying good morning, upon which the others threw themselves at his feet, welcoming him as their deliverer. Without even waiting for his orders, they siezed three other leaders and hanged them to the nearest tree; and then brought all the gold that had been stored up to that time, to the Count.

“Upon my faith, he did not deal too severely with them after that, but in order to ma'e



sure of his position, he passed the best part of a year at the mine. It seems to have agreed with him; you would hardly know him, Baroness. He is erect, has a good color, looks happy and is altogether overflowing with health and good spirits; in fact, a complete transformation has taken place."

The Baroness listened not knowing what to think or what to say. Thunderstruck at what she foresaw might be the consequences of a meeting between this man and poor Arthur.

All the more as this poor Arthur was suffering from the effects of too much champagne.

"At any cost," at last said this excellent woman, "we must prevent them meeting. Come Prince, we must first warn my poor "dear friend," Inez."

As they turned to rejoin the Countess, they met the Baron.

In a few words they acquainted him with what had happened, and the young man turned pale.

They hastened to Inez.

"My dear," said the Baroness excitedly, interrupting the amiable flirtation in which she



was engaged. "My dear, we must find Arthur, and take him away from here immediately."

"Why?" said she smilingly. "Has he got himself into some new trouble? Bah! I shall get accustomed to it in time, these provincials never do anything else."

"Don't laugh Countess."

"No!" added the Prince. "Rather summon all your courage."

"What! Has any misfortune happened?"

"An irreparable one might happen!"

"Please explain!"

"Poor woman! what a terrible blow for you!"

"But yet?"

"Very well, my dear, the Count is here, at Chantilly, in the betting ring. Perhaps only two steps away."

"Monsieur d'Aldaïa!" said Inez terrified. "Antonio? Antonio d'Aldaïa! Here! Ah! my God! my God! If Monsieur de Fandasec meets him! You are right. Look for Arthur, find him, and bring him here, whether he wishes it or not; this might end terribly!"



During this time, the effects of the champagne not having yet worn off, Arthur had seated himself in a sheltered spot apart from the crowd. No one being near he indulged in a soliloquy.

“How stupid they are with their seltzer water! I’m not ill; I’m miserable, that’s about all; miserable because I have lost my illusions....and two thirds of my fortune.”

On the other side of a thicket, which half concealed him from view, he saw his wife, coming towards him, accompanied by the Baron. Not wishing to attract attention, they walked slowly, looking carefully in every direction, and at the same time trying to conceal their anxiety.

“Courting admiration, as usual,” said Arthur to himself. “How I detest the way she walks, looking on all sides of her to see if any one notices her. Oh! how she irritates me! No one can know.”

The others seemed to be discouraged at the fruitlessness of their search. They passed close to the thicket.



“Where is he? Where can he have gone?” exclaimed the Countess.

“She is looking for me,” thought Arthur “to plague me to death, and make an old man of me! Go on looking! Go on!....I am fortunate in escaping even for a moment,” and he withdrew further into the shade.

The sudden shock, and consequent emotion, had proved too much for Inez. There were some chairs placed near, happily somewhat removed from the vulgar gaze, and she sank, almost fainting, into one of them.

“Ah!” said she. “Leave me to myself a moment. I cannot restrain my tears any longer. Good heavens! is it possible that my first husband is on the grounds, and that my second may meet him at any moment!”

Fandansec had been listening, and the apprehensions of the miserable woman being confirmed by the answering remarks of the others, he yielded to an irresistible feeling, and sprang towards the group, separated from him by only a few branches.

“What is that you were saying?” cried he. “That the Count d’Aldaia is here?”



“Alas!”

Arthur smiled bitterly.

“At last!” said he, with a sigh of relief, and placing his hat a little more to one side. “At last we shall have the pleasure of seeing this gentleman, this fire eater, who has failed to put in an appearance for eighteen months. Where is he, this brilliant bully? I am listening, but fail to hear the clashing of his avenging armor! Perhaps some one has warned him that I am here, and he has thought it prudent to withdraw.”

“He is tipsy!” said the Prince, in a low voice, looking troubled.

“Come, come, my dear fellow,” said the Baron, coming forward, and adopting a gentleman-like tone of authority. “Be calm, if you please, and don’t waste any more time in mere bravado. It is only too true what you’ve heard. The Count d’Aldaïa is here, and you ought, if only for decency’s sake, and for the safety of your wife, to leave the place.”

“I?” roared Arthur. “Hide myself? What do you take me for? Upon my word, gentlemen, you make me doubt your claim to be



considered noblemen. What! Do you suppose a Fandansec could run away? Never! do you hear? I came from the country of Arles, and you will soon see what that means. Come, let us go and find this little gentleman."

"He has pluck enough and no mistake," said the Baron, speaking aloud his thoughts.

"Undoubtedly," added the Prince. "At the same time, my good fellow, have you sufficiently reflected?"

"About what?"

"Of the probable intentions of the Count? A man of his character can have only one object in view, with regard to the Countess."

"And what may that be?"

"To take her from you!"

"You believe, my dear fellow, on your word of honor," said Arthur, gradually regaining his self-possession, "that he can have no other object in view?"

"Damn it all! Put yourself in his place, and think what you would do?"

Arthur appeared embarrassed.

"Oh! I!.... I!..." said he, suddenly becoming reserved, "that is quite a different matter.



But if Monsieur d'Aldaïa intends calling me to account in any way, as a gentleman, you cannot expect me to admit the idea of concealing myself from him for one moment. No, gentlemen, a thousand times no! My descent dates as far back as yours, and my duty is plain: to wait for him unflinchingly."

"Yes, that is plucky," repeated the Baron."

But Arthur accepted the compliment with indifference.

"To my mind there is no pluck in it," remarked he, simply. "It is only what you owe to yourself. Besides, what is it? Only a thrust of the sword—nothing more—a fine thing!"

"Do you know how to fence?" asked the Prince.

"Do I know how to fence?" retorted the descendant of Bicheterre and Fandansec. "From my birth, my dear fellow, Among people of my rank, from my birth, rest assured!"

"Yet."

"Yet what?" and whirling round his cane like a mill wheel:

"That is the sort of thing, is it not?" added he.



“That! like that! Yes! when one knows nothing about it!”

“But undoubtedly it is true heroism on his part,” said the Baron; “for it is plain he is not afraid of anything, the unfortunate young fellow!”

“Great heavens!” retorted Fandansec with great dignity, “what is a duel after all? Tradition says: The judgment of God! I have confidence in the justice of my own cause! Besides, the most awkward are the most dangerous, I have heard; it is an acknowledged fact. Let him come, this boaster. I am ready for him and....you will then see what a Fandansec is capable of, and how affairs of honor are conducted with us.”

If the Baron admired him, and though the Prince looked grim, Inez simply regarded Arthur as a fool. It was well to talk of the “justice of your cause” and the “judgment of God,” but she knew well what a finished fencer the Count was, and in her opinion, her second husband could not escape being skewered like a chicken. So she also insisted on his de-



parture. But her husband did not even listen, repeating:

“What does Monsieur d’Aldaïa wish? To take you from me? Well! let him come; by all means let him come! It is exactly what I have been wishing for.”

Seeing that there was no means of dissuading him, the Baroness whispered to Inez, that at any rate, the Count ought not to find her with Arthur; it might exasperate her first husband to fury.

Both the Baron and the Prince were of the same opinion.

“Yes, yes, take her away! It would be more prudent. Leave Fandansec to us; we will not leave him, so as to be at hand to interfere, or assist him, if things turn out badly? Should a duel take place, and the unfortunate and brave young fellow get a sword through him, trust him to our honor and experience, Baroness, we will see to the arrangement of everything.”

Strengthened by these assurances, she prevailed on Inez to accompany her, while Arthur supported by his friends, one on each side, mixed with the crowd.



While all this was taking place, the race had been run. Frisette and the other favorites had been easily beaten by Moule a rank outsider, that was not even mentioned in the betting, causing heavy losses to some of the heaviest backers, while the bookmakers reaped a rich harvest. The excitement had reached a great height, and disputes ran high on all sides. Accusations were brought against certain jockeys of connivance in the matter, when the bell announced the beginning of the next race.

And the same bettors renewed their old course, elbowing each other, shouting out the names of their favorites, and taking voluminous notes, while the bookmakers re-commenced calling out in stentorian tones:

“Two to one on the field;” Three to one bar one,” etc., etc....

“A flower for your buttonhole, gents! sixpence for my small bouquets!”

At the same moment that the horses, cantering down the track attracted all eyes, Arthur and his friends appeared on the side of the buffet, and with one accord had come to a



standstill; the Count d' Aldaïa was not ten paces ahead of them!

Fresh looking, happy, in excellent spirits, and arrayed in rather youthful garments, he was seated with the major at a small table, on which were some empty bottles of pale ale. They were laughing and talking together. The flower girl, having descried them, approached and offered a rose to the Count.

He instantly recognized her.

"What! is it you, my girl!" said he. "Ah! you look astonished; you don't recognize me, then?"

"My lord has greatly improved in health."

"The effects of good behavior, little one," added he, chucking her under the chin.

"What bad form," said Arthur.

"Give me a rose," continued the Count, throwing her a louis, "and since you are established in business, I will promise you my custom. You will bring me a flower in the morning, Fulgence, at the same price?"

"I beg your pardon, my lord, but I don't deliver in town myself."

"There you make a great mistake, my



beauty! And to think I never discovered your beauty in the old times!"

"This man can have only one excuse," said Arthur: "grief!"

Fulgence was busy fastening the rose in her old master's button-hole, when she suddenly raised her eyes, and perceived Arthur. Startled and terrified, she could not repress a slight scream.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing; I pricked myself with a thorn."

But the Count, following the direction of her alarmed glance, saw the three young men, and looked at them steadily.

"Ah! my God!" said Fulgence to herself, "what will happen now?"

The Baron on his side was startled.

"I have a shivering feeling all down my back," said he to himself, on seeing the Count arise, and direct his steps toward them.

The anxiety of each had reached its height, and the blood coursed rapidly through their veins.

When the Count was about two paces from the group, he raised his hand to his hat.



"I cannot be mistaken!" said he. Are you not Monsieur Arthur de Fandansec?"

Then, certain it was no other, and without waiting for an answer:

"Yes, it is!" holding out his hand. "It is Arthur, my old friend, Arthur de Fandansec? Ah! I may be forgiven if I hesitated. How you have changed, my dear fellow! Have you been ill?"

Neither Arthur, the Baron, or the Prince knew scarcely what he was about. At first they thought it was sarcasm on the Count's part, a jesting provocation. But, no. The Count was evidently sincere. What did it all mean?

"Excuse me," continued he, "do you object to my accosting you in this manner? Have I offended you in any way?"

"I?" said Arthur, much perplexed and bewildered. "I, no. But I thought, naturally, that you had reasons...."

"What?"

"Damn it! Have you not reason with regard to...."

"To bear ill will against you? Why should I? Ah! yes, now I understand; about the



Countess? What an idea! Not at all, my dear fellow."

"Not at all," repeated the young man, thinking he had heard incorrectly.

"Evidently," continued the Count, "under the circumstance, there might be—doubtless—reason for—yes. But this is an exceptional case, specially exceptional. You cannot understand! Neither is there any necessity for entering too minutely into particulars at present, although this much I may confess to you: far from having any feeling of ill will, I consider myself under an obligation to you for what has happened. Without intending it, it is true, you have done me a great service in relieving me of a conscientious scruple which weighed on my mind.

"You know my dear fellow," continued he, "I am no longer young, and the life the Countess led was altogether too fatiguing for me, for you must know how fond of society she is. On the other hand, the luxuries, to which she had a right, had made sad inroads in my fortune, and I found myself obliged, either to submit to total ruin, or place some restrictions



upon the extravagant expenditure, which was painful to me.

"I had arrived at such a point, that, during nights of sleeplessness, I thought to myself: 'Poor Inez! perhaps it would be better'—for her sake, you understand, Arthur—'that a separation would be advisable.' You must know that delicacy of feeling alone forced me to think of this only; the same delicacy of feeling prevented me from being the first to propose it. Some excuse would have been necessary, and I could not find one.

"At the same time," added the Count, with a good-humored smile, "I might have had a very good one, one day, or one evening rather, the same evening you both left. Do you remember when you were lying under the sofa?"

"The sofa?" asked the Baron. "What sofa?"

"What! Arthur never told you about that? It is worth hearing. He was with the Countess, when, on hearing my footsteps, she hid him under the sofa! Then the most comical scene took place, and Inez fooled me as she might any old simpleton....Quite true, Arthur, isn't



it? He heard all, and how you must have laughed, my boy. But wait!....wait!....we must all take our turn!

"I also ended by laughing, for I had caught a glimpse of our friend's hat, which gave me the clue to the little comedy which had just been enacted.

"He can't remain much longer there, thought I. Arthur is a very sensitive fellow, and too proud in any case to submit to any compromise, and accept the doubtful position of a lover in a family of three. He means to elope with her, that's certain....Very well, by all means let him do it."

"What!" said Arthur, thunderstruck. "You said that to yourself! 'Let him do it!'"

"Damn it all! put yourself in my place."

"Alas!" thought the young man, "I have done that already pretty successfully!"

"By this means, also, any scruples I might have had were removed. I could reduce my expenditure, and attend to my business, which required immediate supervision. Also, I avoided all these recriminations, arguments and tears, which a separation inevitably en-



tails. Everything seemed arranged by a special dispensation of Providence. You understand this, my dear fellow, don't you?"

"I! I understand....," replied Arthur with sudden excitement. "On my soul, I must confess I don't understand anything about it. Am I awake, or dreaming? If all this is not a disagreeable hallucination of the brain, if it is true that I exist, and am really here near you, who tell me such things in a natural way, I must have a nature totally different, or else I have altogether lost my balance."

"Why?" asked the Count. "What is there so very extraordinary in all this?"

"What is there extraordinary? Let me think. I did not dream it, since you have recalled so much to my mind; I did elope with your wife, did I not?"

"Certainly! I witnessed it!"

"You witnessed it?"

"I saw you leave with her! I made a pretense of going back to the club, but kept a watchful eye on all your movements."

"Very well, that being so, you find it ordinary to come and offer me your hand and all



but say, 'thank you!' I am laboring under no mistake? you declared yourself under an obligation to me?"

"Beyond doubt!"

"That is what I fail to understand. And I reply, that in all the wide world your conduct could not be equalled. Have you the habits of Iroquois Indians in your country? You describe to us in a gay, thoughtless manner, the elopement of your own wife, not omitting certain amusing details, as if it were a good farce; as if she had been simply your mistress; indeed, the plaything of an hour. You seem to forget that she was your lawful wife. Is it necessary to keep sounding this in your ears forever?"

The Count smiled.

"Oh!" said he, "my wife....my wife!....You are going little too fast!"

"Excuse me," said Arthur. "She was solemnly married to you by a reverend father, if I remember right?"

"Yes, it is true!"

"And in your country, there is no other legal ceremony to be observed?"



"No other!"

"Very well! Then? ...."

"I will explain" said the Count. "Unforeseen events have taken place. This worthy old monk no longer continues his religious ministrations there. He was ambitious to convert a tribe of Indians, who had encamped in the neighborhood, but they failed to appreciate his never ending sermons, and compelled him to take his departure by setting fire to the hermitage and all it contained. Among the rest, papers of importance, such as marriage certificates etc. After which, the unfortunate devil, weary of converting the noble savage, engaged a passage on board a ship laden with a cargo of salted pigs, and they were all shipwrecked together."

"Can it be possible!" retorted Fandansec. "But there were witnesses to this marriage? Your two lieutenants, if I am not mistaken."

"Exactly."

"They can be found then, and forced to give their testimony...."

"That would be difficult!"

"Why?"



"They were unfortunate. One was hanged for having assassinated the other!"

On hearing this, Arthur sat down.

"So that" added the Count "you are at liberty to banish any scruples you may have on the subject, my friend. Since this marriage, between ourselves! Oh! you know....Pooh!"

"There! everything is satisfactorily arranged!" exclaimed the Prince, greatly relieved that there was to be no fighting.

But Arthur rose excitedly, his eyes flaming, and his lips quivering with passion.

"What do you say, that it is 'all arranged?' he cried, clenching his teeth. "No indeed! Ah! excuse me, gentlemen, it is exactly the contrary."

"How is that?"

"Because, if this is so, I have been the person trifled with and fooled!"

"Fooled?"

"By Heavens, yes! Listen, and you will understand: In all sincerity and truth I eloped with a woman of the world! As I believed, virtuous, a married woman in fact, which ought to explain everything. Laboring



under this impression, I paid her all the respect I considered was due to her. We left for Switzerland, and there went through all the formalities necessary to become naturalized. She obtained a divorce, and we were married. The Notary, Mayor and Clergyman, duly confirmed the ceremony, and I just escaped being made a protestant! but at that I rebelled! And this woman was not really married after all, had no claim to my consideration, so to speak, well then....”

“Well, what?”

“What, then?”

“Well, I have been deceived! simply sold! They have taken advantage of my credulity—on the whole an honorable sentiment! I consider it an abuse of confidence, unworthy, a serious injury.”

“What can be the matter with him?” said the Count, suddenly becoming grave.

“What is the matter with me?” ejaculated Fandansec. “This is the matter, that I have been your dupe, and that I am not satisfied.”

“One moment, sir!” replied d’Aladïa. “I don’t quite relish the sound of that word.”



“Take it as you like, and for God’s sake dispense with these grand airs! What I have said, I maintain; it is my habit, and understand, my ‘good fellow,’ I am not to be intimidated by you, nor any other person in the two hemispheres. Be good enough to remember, that ~~we~~ we are here, and not on the pampas, thank Heaven! There is no forest to burn down—and indeed to confess the truth, I don’t place much faith in any of your grand exploits over the seas. Here we have policemen, trustworthy men, who will see that the forests of our good Duke d’Aumale, is not set on fire. And even, sir, ‘my good friend’ if the policemen do not interfere, I will undertake to keep you in your proper place, if you object to my telling you, that throughout this affair, you have displayed a most characteristic want of delicacy.

“Repeat that again!” cried the old pirate, turning livid.

“The utmost want of delicacy!” repeated Fandansec, rising up on tip-toe.

“All right!”

“All right?” repeated Arthur, shrugging his



shoulders. "He amuses me, this renowned fire-eater!"

The Count advanced a step.

"You must withdraw that word!" he said in a low voice.

"And if I refuse to withdraw it?" replied Arthur, moving forward in his turn.

"I will be under the necessity of pulling your ears for you, my little friend!"

Before he had finished the sentence, Arthur struck him across the face.

The Count assumed an attitude of defense.

But the Major, the Baron, and the Prince threw themselves between them.

"Gentlemen!" said one.

"Fandansec!" exclaimed another.

"Order! for the love of God, order!" cried the Baron, addressing the two adversaries, one after the other.

"My good friend, you are in the wrong!" said the Prince.

"Wrong?" said the other. "You don't understand the circumstances of the case, Prince. If the marriage ceremony before the old father is suppressed, what is this man to Madame de



Fandansec? Nothing more nor less than her lover!"

"Allow me!"

"No! Since I am her husband, her lawful husband, if the Count has never been really married to her, I am not the one that has deceived her: it is he who inflicts the disgrace and ridicule on me. He is my wife's lover; there is no other way of putting it; and her lover before. We have exchanged places; while he allowed me to believe that I deceived him, it was he who...."

"Arthur!"

"A truce to explanations," replied he. "I have insulted him: let us begin from that, and oblige me by handing him my card. The rest can easily be arranged among gentlemen."

They did as he wished. Cards were exchanged, and a preliminary meeting arranged between the seconds, on the following evening at Arthur's house.

The last race had been run; a jockey had been thrown, and broken his back; and the crowd, bookmakers, gamblers, blacklegs, gentlemen,



all mixed in one seething mass, elbowed each other without ceremony, in their frantic efforts to secure a seat in the return train to Paris.





## CHAPTER VII.

### ARTHUR'S REVENGE.

The following morning, Arthur, in his shirt sleeves, was taking a fencing lesson in the dining room of his house at Passy.

Both the Prince and the Baron, his seconds in the coming duel, had insisted upon this, and went themselves in search of a fencing master whom they knew.

Arthur did his best, following conscientiously the directions of the professor.

"One, two, guard, right, thrust, parry."

And lunging forward, he touched Arthur lightly with the button of his foil.

"Well done! perfect!" he added in a satisfied tone.

Then turning to Arthur's friends, he called their attention to his attitude.

"Do you observe the left leg?" said he to them. "Be good enough to observe the left leg."



After which, he threw himself on the defensive, re-commencing with:

“One, two, guard, right, thrust, parry.”

And Arthur again received full on his chest the button of his adversary's foil, while the fencing master continued:

“Good! very good! Perfect!”

The Baron at last interfered:

“I beg your pardon,” said he, “But there is something in all this I do n't quite understand.”

“What may that be, sir?”

“You say: ‘good! very good! perfect!’ but you always touch him.”

“Of course!”

“Why of course?”

“Every time! my dear sir.”

“And I feel it!” said Arthur, rubbing himself.

“That's all very well,” replied the Baron, “but he never parries your thrusts!”

The fencing master smiled in a superior manner.

“My right thrust?” he explained in a self-satisfied manner. “Parry my right thrust? Ah! indeed!”



"Yet," interrupted Swenska, "it seems to me...."

The professor interrupted him:

"My right thrust cannot be parried, gentlemen!" said he. "Will you try it, my lord?" turning to the Prince.

"This has nothing to do with the Prince," retorted the Baron d' Iosk. "Neither with the Prince, nor with you, but solely with our friend, Monsieur de Fandansec."

"Great natural aptitude!" replied the fencing master. "And I will answer for it that in six months...."

"Six months!" explained the Prince, "But Monsieur de Fandansec fights to-morrow!"

"To-morrow morning at the latest!" added Arthur. "You do n't consider this sufficiently. To-morrow morning, my dear professor!"

"I did not understand that!" said the fencing master. "But it does not matter; do n't alarm yourself. There is a means."

"A means?"

"*Parbleu!* I know that much."

"What means?"

"Take pistols!"

---



Arthur and his friends looked dismayed.

"Pistols!" said the Baron. "It is just this: we have not the choice of weapons—"

"Ah! the devil!" cried the other, with a significant grimace.

Then, after reflecting:

"May I be excused for asking who is your adversary, sir?"

"The Count d'Aldaia."

The fencing master's face visibly lengthened. A smile of undisguised compassion spread over his countenance.

"Yes! yes!" said he, disdainfully. "This South American, Brazilian old trapper fellow, is it not?"

"The same. Do you know him?"

"Know him!....I should think so. He came to practice fencing at my room. The most laughable thing! It was not fencing. Only a false feint to disengage, a thrust under the guard, and then....the point of his sword was through his adversary's body."

"Ah!" said Arthur, "the sword went through..."



“His adversary’s body; exactly! Only this is not fencing, it is not correct; it does not count; you understand what I mean?”

“Yet,” objected the Baron, “if the point of his sword went through his adversary’s body! You are a good sort of fellow, can we depend on you....?”

“Ah! let us see,” resumed the Prince. “You see all that Monsieur Fandanseccan do. Well, on your honor, what would you advise him to do?”

“Advise him to do?”

“Yes, and speak frankly.”

The fencing master seemed to consider.

“Speaking seriously, my advice is,” said the fencing master, “to adopt the pistols at any sacrifice.”

“Well, but look at this,” said Arthur, taking up a card which was lying on the table, “foreseeing that I might have a choice of weapons, I went with these gentlemen to have a trial at a shooting gallery, and....this is the result, out of one hundred and fifty shots!”

A slight break at the extreme edge of the card



was all that was visible, and that was through a chance rebound.

The fencing master's face grew longer. Then, adopting a determined tone:

"You wish for my advice?" asked he.

"Yes, yes!"

"Frankly?"

"As frankly as you like."

"In that case, listen: if the affair can be arranged, don't hesitate! That is my advice."

"Never!" exclaimed Arthur, with a passionate movement.

The fencing master seemed to be struck by it.

"Never?" repeated he, questioningly.

"Never! understand once for all, an affair with a Fandansec cannot be arranged."

"Then," replied the professor, "it is a very serious affair?"

"A very serious affair!"

"A question of honor?"

"An affair of honor!"

"That alters the case, and I could not think of leaving a gentlemen in such a straight. Ah! an affair of honor!...Would you two gentle-



men favor me with a few minutes private conversation? I can give you a tip!"

They all seemed re-assured. Now that he could give them a tip, there was no reason for such anxiety. A tip, that was as much as to say he had an infallible talisman which would save Arthur!

Arthur had already left the room, carrying the foils and masks with him.

Seeing this, the fencing master drew near the two friends, and in a low voice, he repeated:

"If the affair could be arranged...."

"What?"

"Don't hesitate!" added he, looking backward, as he stood on the doorstep.

Left alone with Swenska, the Baron in his turn, made a wry face.

"Arrange the affair!" said he. "What a magnificent idea! For my part I will have nothing to do with such a comedy. When the Baron d' Iosk appears on the ground, it must be with the certainty that one of the adversaries shall be left on the ground."

During all this time, Inez was undergoing intense anxiety. With her face pressed against



the window-pane, and her gaze fixed on the waving branches of the trees, she thought of Arthur and his friends, repeating to herself from time to time:

“Ah! My God!....Will they never leave?”

Then her apprehensions increasing:

“Provided the other has only understood! Provided he does not come just as they are leaving!”

To what strange thoughts could she be a prey?

Although she left the races with the Baroness, she knew what had taken place between her two husbands.

Another woman would have yielded to despair.

When Arthur had thus publicly insulted a man like the Count, that is to say, an adventurer who never shrank from anything, however desperate—she had already some experience on that point—was it not useless to dream, even for a moment, of preventing a murderous encounter?

Yet she cherished a vague hope, and resolved



to try and do what she could to avert such a terrible catastrophe.

Should a duel take place, there was no doubt in her mind as to what would be the result. Arthur would certainly bite the dust. That was inevitable!

Again she thought of what her own fate would be: left a widow, and what was still worse, a widow without position, ruined and destitute of any claim to the consideration or esteem of others.

If Arthur had made any settlement in her favor, or even made a will, it might be different; but this he had failed to do, and being a foreigner, she did not know, that as his widow, she had a claim on any property which might be left by his uncle, at Bicheterre, and the Canoness.

Taking all this into consideration, it was better that Arthur should live.

Arthur secured her a fortune in the future, and he also secured to her a position in society.

How save him from this impending fate, which would be so fatal to all her hopes?

She could not exactly decide, but trusted to



the inspiration of the moment, should she find herself alone with Antonio, and to the knowledge she possessed of his weaknesses, and the vulnerable points of his self-conceit.

Even before leaving Chantilly, she had gone into a café near the station, asked for pen and paper, and had written to the Count.

It was an easy matter to secure the co-operation of the Baroness. The lady adored meddling with other people's affairs, intriguing, making herself important, in order to have it in her power, later on, to repeat everything under the plea of secrecy to her latest acquaintance, reserving for herself the character of a heroine in whatever scandal she had been mixed up—

It was she, Mme. d' Iosk, who undertook to have this note delivered safely into the Count's hands, and she did not fail to do so.

Immediately the train arrived at Paris, she found a messenger, and slipping a franc into his hand, made him swear, that even if it necessitated his staying the entire night at the Hotel du Louvre, where d' Aldaïa had put up



for the moment, he would hand the note to him.

Inez had thus written to her former husband:

"I must see and speak to you. I must!—this second 'must' was underlined three times, in a nervously excited manner—"I must have a private interview with you."

"If you are not dead to every feeling of delicacy and honor you cannot refuse this much to the one whose reputation you so nearly sacrificed on the Pampas.

"I do not insist. Do you remember Antonio? Then tomorrow, in the afternoon, be somewhere in the neighborhood of our house, and keep concealed under the shadows of the poplars, and watch carefully the second window to the left, on the first floor in front of the house.

"When you see a red silk scarf, shaken by a hand you cannot have quite forgotten, come to the house. I will be alone to receive you, and there will be no chance of interruption.

"Give some assumed name to the servant who will open the door, a French, German, Polish, or Russian name. so that when my husband hears it repeated, he will not suspect anything. Besides, are you not the last person in all the universe, whom he would suspect of presenting himself at the house, after what happened at the races.

"Come, I wish it, you must, and you owe it to

"Your

"INEZ."

There was no possible means of receiving an



answer, so Inez had spent the morning in a state of mortal anxiety.

“Has he received my note?” she kept asking herself. “And if he has received it, what will he think? What decision will he arrive at? Perhaps he will suspect me. Will he come?”

About two o'clock, she fancied she saw a shadow wandering about, under the trees in the Avenue. Her instinct had not deceived her. It was Antonio; the Antonio of former times, lively, alert, bronzed by the sun and even superb in the possession of perfect health and vitality.

“Ah! if those others would only leave the house!”

Feverish and excited, she threw herself down on her knees by the side of the bed, and offered prayers to the Virgin, binding herself by a solemn vow, to burn six wax tapers, costing a franc and a half each, if her holy intervention procured her success in this undertaking.

An orthodox Catholic, after the manner of Spanish Colonists, she did not doubt for one moment, that six tapers at a franc and a half,



could fail to tempt the Holy Mother of God, to aid her in this grand affair.

Indeed, she might have practiced economy. But, possibly, her modesty made her doubtful of the feelings her first husband still entertained toward her, and she felt the need of some one to intercede on her behalf, either in this world or the next.

In fact, on receiving the letter, the Count, judging from his looks, experienced a feeling of surprise, not unmixed with annoyance.

Suddenly a smile, not altogether devoid of malice, irradiated his countenance.

“Well, frankly,” said he to himself, “this is an original idea! this is a pretty game! To come in secret to her former husband; to change from Bartholo to Almaviva, is amusing to a superlative degree!

“And to think,” added he, by way of being keenly philosophical, “that there are people in this country, opposed to divorce! This would be a most interesting case to submit to their notice. When would this institution, that they call marriage—so monotonous in itself—furnish a situation more attractive?



How is it, that the partisans of divorce have not placed some such highly-seasoned episode in the hands of their pleaders? It would be enough to entice their opponents. Enough to convert the most obstinate and skeptical."

It was while indulging in these sentiments, that, at the hour appointed, or rather a little in advance, he turned his footsteps in the direction of Passy. Inez need not have feared that he would become impatient; he would have waited there until the crack of doom, so much did the spiciness of the whole affair tickle his self-love.

And in fact he was not put to any very severe test.

Tired, worn out and exhausted by the fatiguing exercises he had gone through so religiously with the fencing-master, Arthur declared he was literally incapable of another effort.

"Well?" said the Prince when he returned.

"Well," replied the young man, "I am awfully tired."

"Yes! but the solving of the enigma?"

"Ah! that did not amount to very much."



And seeing the look of discouragement on his friends' faces:

"But that does not matter," said Arthur. "Things must remain as they now are: the most expert in the art of fencing do not always display the same amount of skill on the ground, when instead of a foil, well buttoned, they have a pistol pointed in their direction, in the hands of a man determined to shoot straight. Besides, there is no more time to waste. And now, as the hour is near for the meeting between the seconds, let us go. I will wait for you down stairs in the cab, so as to learn your decision at once. I have some final arrangements to make."

"My dear fellow," said the Baron, thinking he was alluding to his will, "you must not give up all hope, what the devil...."

"You don't understand me," replied Arthur, holding up his head. "I was not alluding to those arrangements."

"What were you alluding to, then?"

"My dear friends," continued Arthur, "one is, or one is not, a man of the world, a leader of society, one of the upper ten, one of those



on whom the eyes of the masses are fixed. Well, when it happens that you are one of those superior beings, it is your simple duty, on every occasion, to set a good example to the general public. Do you not agree with me?"

"Of course."

"Never let us forget," continued Arthur, "that the breath of the Revolution spread itself over society, secular institutions, families, religion, etc. Everything is mixed up at the present day, and all the old landmarks, that so distinctly separated the classes, have been almost obliterated. Well, it is for us to protest, to oppose, by the nobility of our actions, a barrier to the advancing tide of vulgarity and Communism. To prove that we are made of finer clay, and the possessor of finer attributes.

"A member of the common classes," pursued Arthur, "some wealthy tradesman, finding himself in my position, would shut himself up in his room, and, with teeth chattering in his head, would employ the last few hours left him, by specifying on paper how his few miser-



able *sous* were to be disposed of, in the event of his death.

"I, gentlemen, I propose to take a drive round the lake presently; pass the evening at the Bouffes, for unfortunately there is no opera to-night, and in conclusion, instead of declaring my last wishes—indeed I've nothing left to give away, hardly more than will meet my funeral expenses—I intend to invite all my friends, to a supper at the Café Anglais, and await there, the hour fixed for the encounter.

"There" said he, pulling himself up to his full height "that is the style to adopt when you want to show what you are made of; and conscious of the obligations you are under to your equals, when in your heart you wish to protest against the Anarchy, which reigns in the manners and customs of the times."

The Prince and the Baron were lost in admiration. This was "High Life" and no mistake.

"Come along! let us look after these seconds of the Count," repeated Arthur looking for his cane.

He happened to draw back the curtain of



the window, and looking out, he unconsciously gave utterance to an exclamation of surprise.

“What is it?” asked the Prince.

“Oh! nothing!” replied Fandansec hastily. “Suppose you go first, gentlemen, perhaps it would be better to go alone. I will follow presently, and in about an hour, will meet you in the Bois.”

We can easily divine what disturbed Arthur’s equanimity. He had caught a glimpse of the Count d’Aldaïa, and invented this excuse to gain time to assure himself that there was no mistake.

As soon as the friends left, he opened a drawer, and took out a field glass, which he leveled at the shady spot where he had seen the apparition.

At the moment, there was not a trace of any one. The trees prevented him from seeing very distinctly.

He waited, trembling with rage, grinding his teeth, wild, furious.

A little later the vision re-appeared, shadowy at first, then more distinct.



It was indeed the Count. Not a doubt of it. And the Count in good spirits, joyous, gay; an impatient victor, but certain of his welcome.

“What is he doing there?” the young man asked himself. “What can he be watching for? Is it possible he can be making signs?.... And to whom?.... Good God! to whom, then?”

And drawing himself back to the extreme end of the window, he found he could discern every movement clearly.

That the Count was making signs was evident. He seemed to be asking something.

But yet, who could he be addressing? Was it possible he had bribed one of the servants to furnish him with information?

Suddenly Arthur heard the sound of a window opening up stairs.

The Count turned and looked up, still more enquiringly. Then he held his head in a listening attitude, forming with his hand a sort of ear trumpet.

“Some one must be speaking to him,” said Arthur to himself.



He also listened, and it seemed to him he heard a voice murmur:

“Not yet”

Upon which this Romeo made signs that he understood.

“All right!” he seemed to say.

And he withdrew under the shade of the trees.

Although it was not much that Arthur had seen, yet it was enough.

The window had been opened by Inez. He had recognized her voice when she murmured:

“Not yet!”

It was enough. He formed his plans on the instant.

Ostensibly, and in a perfectly tranquil manner he went into the ante-chamber, calling up a servant:

“If anyone should ask for me,” said he, “I can be seen at the club till four o’clock. After that I shall be at the Bois, at the left side of the lake. I think of returning home for dinner at seven o’clock, but if anything should prevent me doing so, I shall certainly pass the evening at the Bouffes, stall 45. Note this



carefully, for there may be matters of importance to consult me about."

He stopped to correct a figure that the footman had written badly, and then left, whistling a hunting song.

Inez anxiously watched him from an upper window. She saw him go along the avenue, hail a driver, get into a cab, and disappear.

"At last!" she sighed. "And now for the other!"

She then took a red scarf, and passing an arm, lovely enough to serve as a model for Phidias, across the shutters of the half-opened window, she gave the signal agreed upon.

By way of an answer the Count threw back a kiss.

She withdrew and went to the drawing-room.

Scarcely had she installed herself in a carefully studied attitude on the lounge, when the door bell rang.

"There he is!" she said to herself.

There was a short delay.

Then the parlor maid appeared.

"A gentleman asks to see my lady."



“His name?”

“Monsieur de Wall 'el Réas.” A compatriot of my lady's, who crossed over to France in the same steamer with her.”

“Oh! Yes, I remember perfectly, now,” cried the Countess, as if speaking to herself. “An old friend of the family, a god-son of my sainted mother's. Show him in, Justine, show him in!”

Justine was completely taken in, and hastened to admit the visitor.

When the Count and Inez found themselves alone, a scrutinizing glance passed from one to the other.

The Countess could not dispute the fact, that her ex-husband, had greatly changed for the better.

On his side, he was struck with the fascinating beauty of the Countess.

“May the devil take me!” said he mentally; “if she is not handsomer than ever! That young fool Arthur, damn it all, is a fortunate scamp.”

When removed from each other, people we have lived with, benefit by our forgetfulness



of their shortcomings, as we are apt to remember only their attractions.

Inez was in the full splendor of early maturity. She also had changed to advantage, and her natural elegance had arrived at the height of its perfection.

The Count did not remember many little things, which had in a greater or less degree, annoyed him formerly; even that cursed "Beggar my Neighbor," which had almost driven him to a state of idiocy. He merely contemplated her, as she appeared then, in all her matchless beauty, and gave her the admiration which was her due.

The sight of Inez, alone, as she appeared then, was sufficient to transport him with admiration, even if he did not indulge in a lingering desire, to be revenged on M. de Fandansec.

Meanwhile as she had asked him to come, he naturally concluded that she wished to obtain something from him.

What?

He determined to be circumspect in his dealings with her—to keep a hold over her as



long as he could—and he advanced with due ceremony, saying:

“You have done me the honor, Madame, to ask for an interview. I am here in accordance with your wishes. How can I oblige you?”

With a courteous gesture, Inez pointed to a chair at the foot of the lounge on which she reclined, half smothered in a heap of lace and embroidered draperies, where gauze, cambric and silk, were blended together in the most artistic manner.

“Please sit down. And now, how do you do?”

With the last phrase, she held out her hand with the grace of a queen; a movement which displayed an arm so exquisitely modeled, and a skin of such velvety softness, that would have tempted St. Anthony himself.

“She is adorable!” said the Count to himself, clenching his hands. “That young villain, Arthur! the mean scamp!.....”

Feeling completely overcome, the old free-booter lowered his eyes.

“For the safety of my soul,” breathed he, with an accent that was almost prayer, “don’t



look at me in that way, Madame!.....Have the charity to think, that I now realize all that I have lost!"

It was really impossible to pay to any woman homage more delicate or complete.

But the Countess only waited to prove the power she still held over this man, and to derive confidence for the success of the project she had in view.

"Do you know," said she to him, "that you are wonderfully improved?"

"Do you mean it?" replied the Count, modestly.

"Yes! without flattery, you have become quite rejuvenated. And then, what is this that I hear? You have regained your fortune?"

"Almost!"

"Altogether, if I may believe what has been told me. It seems that you had only to make your appearance at the mine, in order to put everyone in his proper place."

"They listened to reason, it is true."

"And gold flows, then?"

"You have described the situation accurately: it simply flows!"



"I am delighted to hear it, my dear."

"I do not doubt it, Madame."

"So that now you are happy?"

"Absolutely! That is to say, a hundred times more than I deserve."

A short silence followed.

"I used to think," re-commenced Inez, "I used to think that you were one of those whom happiness rendered generous."

"What has happened to give you a less favorable impression of me?"

"Have I not learned that you intend to kill my husband?"

"If they informed you correctly, my dear Madame, you must know the fault was not mine. I did not wish it, and I tried to avoid a quarrel. It was he, on the contrary, who insulted me. Have your informants been truthful enough to explain this to you, or must I relate everything?"

"Quite unnecessary!"

"And in such a case?"

"I do not trouble myself about the cause," continued Inez. "I merely think of the consequences."



“Well?”

“Well! my dear Antonio, you must not kill my husband!”

“Pardon me, dear Madame!”

“You will kill him?”

“Like a little rabbit!”

“Nonsense!”

“With sabre, pistol, carbine, rifle, on foot or on horseback, he can have his choice; but to-morrow, at dawn, as true as we are here, I swear that he will add to the number of those whom I have sent to repose on the bosom of Abraham. You can rely upon that, if you will do me the honor to remember the sort of man I am.”

“Bah!” said Inez.

“There is no ‘bah!’ dear Madame. Order your mourning now, if you choose.”

The ex-Countess, who had received him smilingly, did not cease to smile during all the time that she took to answer.

“My dear friend” said she at last, “if I know the sort of man you are, you cannot entirely have forgotten the strength of purpose, and the clear-sightedness, with which



heaven has gifted me. I have made up my mind also, and I am determined not to be made a widow, nor to lose the rank which I have struggled for—with such pains—in society. I am indifferent to Monsieur de Fandandsec; he has disappointed me thoroughly. But such as he is, I wish him to live, and I mean that he shall.”

“Alas! until the break of day.”

“No!”

“What will you wager?”

Inez shrugged her shoulders:

“Do you know who will be here, before you can accomplish this fresh exploit?”

“Ah! dear Madame, what the devil is it to me who arrives?”

“He will come....my husband.”

“Fandandsec?”

“Fandandsec!”

“Let him come!”

“Not alone, my dear Antonio, not alone, but with two good police agents, and a magistrate, who will not listen to any nonsense.”

“What to do?” demanded the Count, with a vague feeling of discomfort.



“To give undeniable proof that you are here!”

“What!”

“That you are here; which constitutes, as you are doubtless aware, a penal offense; see article number....”

“Ah! Come, let us see” said the Count. If this is a joke, it is rather amusing, most original!”

“Original altogether!” replied Inez. Two years in prison. Tell me, Count, do you know how to weave felt slippers?”

The Count did not laugh any longer. He might set fire to forests, exterminate tribes of Indians, struggle against the angry waves, as novelists say, or shoot those who contradicted him, all without changing color; but the prospect of twenty-four months at Poissy, visibly intimidated him.

Yet was it so serious? Was it possible, that he, the terror of the Pampas, could be reduced to such a pass?

He could not bring himself to believe it.

Nevertheless, certain remembrances, in connection with this woman, came back to him,



The scene of the sofa, more particularly. She had displayed histrionic ability of no mean order, and had he not by chance perceived Arthur's hat, stupidly forgotten by the owner, he would have been completely deceived.

The devil!

But no! Admitting that Inez, anxious to avenge herself for the cavalier and summary manner in which he had forced her to marry him, had conceived this vulgar device, to surprise him by the authorities, would Arthur countenance such a proceeding?

Let him think. A Fandansec, the descendant of several illustrious families, to join in such a snare!

It was a little strong. But the old pirate had been long enough in Paris, to know what even higher men of birth than Arthur, were capable of.

How many, who bore names of even historic renown, had been discovered, some cheating at cards, others making an abuse of their position as members of the Ministry to speculate on the Bourse, etc.



Why then, should M. de Fandandsec be more particular? It must not be forgotten, also, that this second husband of Inez had been brought up at a Seminary!

The more the Count reflected, the less he liked the situation; it did not appear to him at all impossible that Arthur would condescend to mingle in such a plot, and, finally, the ingenuous d'Aldaia found himself in the toils!

In fact it was logical. What other means to avoid the duel, could Arthur devise? For he must know, it would end fatally for him.

The Count no longer doubted.

"All the same," said he, "he is a pretty gentleman!"

However, as he was not a bad actor, he assumed a bold front.

"Come!" said he, "it is well played, my dear, and I give in! What are your conditions?"

Instinctively he drew a check book from his pocket, thinking that he would not be free to go without paying ransom.

"One condition alone!" replied Inez, "one alone."



"Name it."

"The duel must be fought with pistols, you must exchange two shots each, and your honor will be satisfied."

"And then?"

"That is all!"

"I don't understand," said the Count.

"You are rather obtuse, my dear. I only hold to one thing: to remain the wife, and not the widow, of Monsieur de Fandansec."

"But he has spent his all! He has not a *sou* left to bless himself with!"

"So much the better!"

"You astonish me."

"Difficulties and privations, bind hearts more closely together," replied Inez, "We belong to a wealthy family, in the country of Arles...."

"I understand!"

"Come then," said she, "Are we agreed?"

"To oblige you, dear friend."

"In that case, write out the agreement, and let us sign."

"Sign what?....that....?"



"That the duel will not end fatally for Monsieur de Fandansec?"

"But what security do you want?"

"A forfeit!"

"How much?"

"Fix that yourself, my dear Count."

Altogether reassured, he found the adventure more and more original. So without further hesitation, he went to the table, took some paper for the purpose of putting their agreement into writing.

Wishing that the deed might be couched in terms worthy of the recipient, he searched carefully for words suitable to his purpose.

As he was commencing the first phrase, Inez bounded from the couch like a wounded panther.

"Listen!" said she in a low, agitated voice.

"What for?"

"Hush! Don't you hear. They are coming back!"

"Who?"

"He!"

"Arthur?"

"Yes! Arthur!"



The Count seemed paralyzed, and still believing in the complicity of his successor:

"Too soon!" said he growing angry. "He returns too soon. There is only one thing to do...."

"At least," added he, "I hope it won't be necessary to yield him up my watch!...."

But without listening to him, Inez rapidly bolted the door; then returning to d' Aldaia:

"You then believed that we were together in this plot?" she demanded in a tone of superb disdain.

"How? It was false? it was....?"

"You are not very bright, my dear. Do you imagine that a Fandansec would withdraw from an affair of honor? You still bear the impress of your education!"

The Count saw that he had been mistaken, and he felt mortified. Decidedly, he had misunderstood this woman. The influence, perhaps, of "Beggar My Neighbor." But now, to do her justice, he was bound to confess, that she had surpassed herself.

The peril was imminent, How to escape it?



He could not see any means, and at that moment, some one knocked violently at the door.

"Open, Inez; open!" cried Arthur.

No other voice accompanied his. The summons then was not made then in the name of the law. It was impossible to suspect any mutual understanding existing between the husband and wife.

While the Count argued thus with himself, Inez had opened the door of a cupboard, and turning towards the old trapper:

"There, and quickly!" said she.

"But....but," said the Count, "he will discover me there, and in what a position!"

"Your memory fails you, Antonio. I will undertake that he does not discover you.

"Yet...."

"Do you remember?...."

"What?"

"The sofa!"

Outside, Arthur continued to knock violently at the door, the hinges of which began to yield, and he swore like a trooper.

My faith! half subdued, half stunned, the Count, as a last resource, slipped inside



the cupboard. But remembering, as Inez had suggested, at the moment she was about to shut the door:

“My hat!” said he.

The young woman passed it to him, and locking the door, she concealed the key in the folds of her dress.

It was time! The woodwork of the door gave way.

Inez ran to the door, drew back the bolt, first removing some hairpins from her hair, so that when necessary her hair might fall over her shoulders; then, falling on her knees, upon the entrance of her husband, she cried:

“Mercy!” and she clasped her hands, and holding her head down, repeated:

“Mercy!....I am guilty!”

“Who drew that bolt?” demanded Arthur, in a terrible voice.

“He did! I will tell you all!”

“He? The Count, you mean?”

“I will tell all,” repeated Inez, drawing deep breaths. “He watched you go out, and forced an entrance here, in spite of all I could do. Ah! Arthur! Arthur!”



"Where is he?" yelled the young man, furiously.

"Gone!"

"You lie!"

"Gone! I swear to you!"

"Again you lie! I would have seen him."

"Ah! My God! Ah! Lord! Holy Virgin, don't abandon me!" exclaimed the Countess, with increased terror in her voice.

And by a slight movement she allowed all her luxuriant hair to fall in masses around her, giving to her appearance a false resemblance to the repentant Magdalen.

"Where is he?" repeated Arthur, still more angrily, without stopping to notice all this little by play. "Oh! I shall manage to find him!"

But Inez clung to his arm.

"Arthur!" cried she. "I would rather confess everything. Yes, I will tell you all. Yes, Arthur, he is here....But, mercy!"

"Here? Where then?....Speak! or...."

He made a threatening gesture, upon which Inez, thinking it the proper moment to do so, gave a piercing scream.



Then breathless, half dead, she pointed towards the side door.

“There!” said she, sobbing with grief. “There....in my room....Ah! mercy, for him!”

“Mercy for him!” replied Fandansec, with a yell of Satanic laughter. “We will see!” and he made a step in the direction of the door.

At this moment Inez got up, and throwing back her hair, displayed to view the most mocking visage, it is possible to imagine, even in an imp of hell, and, letting herself drop into a chair, she burst into a peal of laughter almost painful to hear.

Just as she had done at the villa in the Rue Balzac, while Arthur was suffocating under the sofa, she rolled about, holding her sides, and repeating:

“He actually believes it!....No, it is too much. How it does hurt, laughing so much. It will make me ill. Heavens above! How amusing he is!....”

For a moment Arthur stopped to look at



her with a shade of hesitation and doubt on his face.

Then relaxing the severity of his glance, and assuming the tone of one conscious of his superiority:

“Yes, yes!” said he, adopting the cant of the gay man of the world. “I know it. I have seen this little game before, my angel!....” Upon which, returning towards the door:

“It remains between us two, Count!” said he, with buoyant air.

“Arthur,” cried Inez, running after him, with the despairing accent of a person caught in their own toils. “Arthur! In the name of Heaven, have pity!....”

But Arthur, inflexible, repulsed her, and passing out quickly, he replaced the panel in the door and double locked it.

Inez very tranquilly gave two or three knocks against the door, pretending to cling to it; then overturned a chair, to feign that her own beautiful body had fallen prone on the carpet.

That done, she quietly opened the door of the cupboard, saying to the Count:



"There!"

"Accept my compliments," replied he, perfectly astonished.

"As to the duel, I have your word, Antonio?"

"Of honor!" said the Count, kissing her hand. "I could never forgive myself for running counter to the wishes of a person of your talent."

And he left.

When Arthur returned to the room, out of sorts and dispirited, he found his wife before the glass arranging her hair.

"Well?" said she, with her habitual grace.

"Well!" replied Fandansec, still keeping up the idiom of the club. "You think you know women."

"And then?...."

"And then;... you don't know them!"

"But you, my dear?"

"I.... I did not know them; that is all!"



## CHAPTER VIII.

### WHERE ARTHUR DE FANDANSEC FIGHTS A DUEL.

There was a regatta that day at Chatou.

Regattas also appeared on the programme of "High Life." And the pick of Yole's Club especially, had done such marvels with the oar, rowing with a swing, precision, and clock-like regularity of movement, as brought them at the end of the day, victors over all other competing crews.

This is why, on the evening of the same day, Arthur de Fandansec, who had engaged a private room at the Café Anglais and awaited his guests there, was very much disturbed by the row in the adjoining room, made by the crew of the winning four, which had carried away the gold medal at the said regatta of Chatou.



They certainly had a jolly time of it, these brawny athletes. There were ladies also—ladies! let it be understood—ladies who sang songs that would bring blushes to the cheeks of an abbé.

And Arthur, who did not feel in a laughing mood, repeated to himself every five minutes:

“Damned fools! How can men make such idiots of themselves?”

At last, unable to bear it any longer, he rang the bell.

“Send Ernest up,” he said, in an angry tone.

While waiting for Ernest (the head waiter) he gave himself up to reflection.

“There are times,” he said, “when all this sort of thing appears unnatural. I know, that in the romances of Arèsne Houssaye, that which is happening to me, is as common and frequent an occurrence as a letter by post. But however faithfully this great master may depict the manners and habits of ‘High Life,’ novels are novels. And every now and then I feel myself the plaything of a fantastic dream, of some giddy nightmare, which troubles and confuses me, and leaves me doubtful of the



reality of my existence. It is an oppression of the brain, closely allied to madness. I have pinched myself, in order to be assured that I am not a prey to somnambulism."

At this moment Ernest entered.

Impressive in his desire to please, as impassible as a donkey about to be curry-combed, the waiter entered the room noiselessly, shut the door softly, and was at Arthur's side before the latter knew anything about it.

"You rang, sir?" demanded he.

"Ah! Ernest! Let me see, Ernest; what are they doing next door? Do you hear them?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"They are raising a devil of a row. What sort of people are they?"

"People of the best society, sir."

"It would seem so!"

"Pardon me, sir, the scions of our noblest houses! Only they have been drinking rather freely!"

"In that case, they ought to be in bed. Why the devil don't they go there?"

"They had gone, sir, but some other gentlemen in the adjoining room challenged them



across the partition. At first they began by insulting each other. Then they sent delegates with a view of obtaining satisfaction; and as the seconds were themselves in an equally incapable condition, one of them began to shed maudlin tears. On perceiving this, another, who began to feel very ill, embraced him, and the affair came to an end without any serious consequences. Now they are the best of friends. They are all in a half gushing state, ladies and all."

"Ah! very well, then, I suppose they are going to continue this din all night?"

"Ah! no, sir: don't be uneasy. You see I have experience in these matters. When they begin by taking things seriously, they end by becoming affectionate; poetry, wild flowers; it is always the case!.... And wait a moment, sir," added Ernest, assuming a listening attitude, "they are arriving at the affectionate stage, listen....."

Arthur remained silent, and heard a voice, laboring under some little difficulty, it is true, sing in a melancholy and lachrymose tone:—



"'Tis for *ta mere*, my charming one,  
You braved the blush, your task is done.  
Take twenty *sous* and homeward haste,  
As undefiled and wholly chaste  
As when you came. The Artist ne'er  
Would take the bloom from rose so fair,  
E'en though the rose in squalor grew—  
Your poverty has shielded you.  
*Adieu, petite!* May heaven guard,  
And make your stony path less hard.  
I would I were the king of Spain,—  
I'd have you come to me again,  
And for my model's guileless sway  
A hundred *sous* would give each day."

"In ten minutes," continued Ernest, they will  
begin 'Aï, Chiquita!' you know."

"They say thou'rt never going to wed—  
Then number me among the dead."

"And considering that they have consumed  
large quantities of green Chartreuse, I would  
not be astonished, sir, if they went so far as to  
end in a canticle:"

"Most happy is the faithful heart  
That throbs with fervor, scorning art."

"All this happens among these fast young  
gentlemen; it is generally the canticle which  
is sung most vigorously."

"I don't say no," said Arthur, "but at the  
same time, it is excessively annoying. I came



here in advance of the others, to write a few.... last wishes."

"Sir!...." said Ernest, betraying not a little emotion.

"Ah!...." cried Arthur, with a grace of manner worthy of the philosophical man of the world. "One must not take fright at mere words. But when one is.....on the threshold of eternity—yes.....putting it plainly, on the threshold of eternity, Ernest, it is better to arrange certain little details.....I was just about to—I am only saying this as you happen to be here—express my wish that a little souvenir be left to you....."

"Sir!" replied Ernest, feelingly, "Monsieur de Fandansec!...."

Grief is contagious. Seeing this old waiter making efforts to overcome his emotion, Arthur was really touched and also flattered.

He found himself so lonely, so isolated, under circumstances where one ought to be surrounded and supported by friends, for the bravest men, the night before a duel, are apt to find some difficulty in keeping gloomy and discouraging thoughts at bay.



Also the desire for sympathy, and need of confiding your wishes to some friend, regarding the perilous moment so soon to arrive, is almost irresistible.

In the absence of this, one writes. This is why Arthur, who had shown himself so disdainful to that class of people who devoted their last moments to making their will, had unconsciously imitated them, in writing "a little note" of what he called "last wishes."

Altogether disconcerted at failing to surprise the Count with Inez, he had not been able to keep his appointment at the lake, and when, having found his witnesses, he was informed by them that the weapons chosen were pistols, he even neglected his dinner; he found a bowl of soup sufficient.

He went to the Bouffes of course! There, he would be certain to meet some of the people who knew about the forthcoming duel, and it would be some satisfaction to let himself be seen as if on any ordinary occasion; a foolish act under such circumstances!

Besides, the play would interest him, and help to pass the hours that yet intervened be-



fore the time arrived for the sumptuous repast he was to share with his friends, and which he hoped would have the effect of rousing and inspiring him with that cool courage, becoming to him under the circumstances.

Among all those he met at the Bouffes, not one made allusion to the approaching duel, nor did they seem to have heard of it! So he concluded they must be ignorant of the fact.

As for the play, never in all the many times he had listened to her, had Théo seemed to suffer so much from hoarseness. Daubray exasperated him, and Mme. Peschard, cleverly disguised as she was, failed to deceive him.

The little Luce alone, with her youthful silliness, and mocking, mischievous face, served to interest him.

But how wearisome it all was to him! He had seen the piece twenty times without feeling in any way shocked or disgusted. On the contrary, the unlooked-for situations, silly jests and absurdities, had delighted him to such a degree, that at their late suppers, he was in the habit of amusing his friends by imitating



to the best of his ability all the more grotesque bits of the evening.

And the music! Could anything be more unfinished in style! It was altogether flat and out of tune, and he could not even bring himself to criticize such a performance.

It was not want of courage on his part. No; he would go through his part bravely the following morning, although not having a doubt of the issue of the combat.

"With the pistol," said he to himself, "I have not a chance. My fate is ordained! This freebooter has too sure an eye, and too steady a hand to let me escape. No; my fate is decided!"

And he made up his mind to it, not gaily, but in a determined manner. Only, by Jove! it is an uncomfortable experience to undergo, and one may be permitted, if not actually afraid, to be at least preoccupied, when only a few hours intervene between you and a violent death.

After the first act he left the theatre, unable to support any longer the silly buffooneries of the actors, and the joyous delight with which



their jokes were received by the good-natured public.

The fresh air calmed his over-wrought nerves, and after looking at his watch five or six times, without seeing what hour it was (this had become a habit with him lately), he lighted a cigar, and continued on his way to the Boulevard, endeavoring to assume an air of indifference. He every now and then stopped to look in at the shop windows.

Frequently he saw nothing at all, and for one long moment he remained lost in admiration before a display of bottles of boot varnish.

A chemist's detained him a long time. One would have supposed he took a deep interest in numbering all the precious discoveries which showed so forcibly the genius and humanity of men of science.

He roused himself at last from a deep fit of abstraction, resumed his walk, whistling an air which had been sung by the little Luce that evening.

On arriving at the Café Anglais, he entered, and was vaguely disappointed at finding himself alone.



"Ah! well! Yes, it is true; tomorrow, in a few hours from now I am to be shot! I will have ceased to live. Perhaps it's all the better," said he, throwing himself down on a chair, overcome with lassitude.

"Fortune, rank, affection, have all been sacrificed. And for what? For a woman who....

"No! This woman is not responsible for my folly. She was not the cause, but merely an unconscious means, a chance occurrence, an accident in my life, nothing more.

"The first cause was my own want of good sense; reading these books, which filled my imagination with false ideas, and the pleasure of which arose from the secrecy with which I pursued them—the forbidden fruit.

"This constitutes the charm and delight. For, after all this, Monsieur Arsène Houssaye is innocent of any intentional harm doing. He does not write these books from any unworthy motive, neither does he profess to believe in them. I was wrong to think evil of this talented writer; wrong to attribute my weakness as the consequence of having devoured so greedily his fascinating romances. In this



solemn moment, while confessing my folly, I humbly beg to offer him my excuses."

Having made this self-examination, Arthur felt more contented, and it was in this frame of mind that he asked for pen and ink, for the purpose of noting down a few last wishes, as he had said; an occasion for leaving little remembrances to those of his friends whom he would not like to have forget him; courteous proceedings for a sensible man, a sort of P. P. C. card.

Singularly enough, among the numerous acquaintances he had made since he came to the gay capitol, he could not recall the name of one on whom he would like to bestow his mark of friendship, "*in extremis!*"

The Countess?....Ah! no! It was enough that he left her what he could not take away: the property at Geneva.

His friend Anatole? Yes, Anatole deserved to be remembered.

He had been rather hard upon him at Rigi-Kulm; he had said mortifying things to him, the friend of his boyhood, but it arose from



the sincerity of his friendship. Anatole was a noble hearted fellow.

And yet, Arthur left him nothing.

There was little doubt in Arthur's mind, not difficult to understand. Anatole was a sincere friend and he wished him every success; but he was commonplace to a degree. And, besides that, he had become wealthy by his marriage with a young person, very amiable, from every point of view; a young girl, in a manner even noble, with exquisite coloring, charming face, radiant in her youthful beauty, most decidedly elegant, and devoted to her husband; everything which had been denied to him, Arthur, a Patrician, born wealthy, etc. To leave anything to this *parvenu*, with a word of friendship, was it not putting himself on terms of equality with one so much beneath him, too great a condescension from one of his rank?

Arthur feared it, and he scratched out the name of Aglaé's husband, of this adorable Aglaé, who, had he chosen, might have been his wife.

But then, who remained?

"The Baron?.... You are joking beyond



doubt! A fine fellow, this Baron! A sort of attitudinizer, married to an old woman, who could never quite rid herself of the atmosphere of the bar-room, kept by her worthy parents; the Baron, a gentleman calculated to provoke laughter, who had consented to allow his friend to try pistols in a duel, knowing well what the result must be. Nothing for the Baron!

As to the Prince Swenska, it was not to be thought of. There still rested some suspicion in his mind, with regard to the photograph dedicated to "Gustave." And could a husband with this suspicion—be it right or wrong—still lingering in his mind, leave a memento of affection to one whom he still accused of poaching upon his preserves?

Arthur did not even begin to write the name of his other second.

But then, damn it all! who was he going to leave anything to? Good taste alone would prevent him mentioning the name of any of his relatives at Arles.

"Then!"

"What! No one?"



"There is still....Ernest!" said he to himself.

Yes! Ernest! Ernest had always been anxious to lavish on him those little attentions and privileges, which a constant visitor appreciates. Ernest, many times, had reserved for him the best room, had placed on one side the choicest cigars, brought him a special brand of Bordeaux; and one day, having parted with his last *sou*, and Arthur having explained his difficulty to the waiter, the latter had brought back his bill for the supper receipted, refusing to accept his watch as security.

Receipted, and paid out of his own pocket, too.

Men don't forget those sort of things, you know.

So that it was not because there was no one else, that Arthur thought of Ernest. It was out of esteem. And when mention was made of this to him, Ernest had betrayed real emotion; had tried, but failed, to conceal his grief from Arthur.

The young man, happy to meet with any



one who was not altogether indifferent to his fate, forgot appearances for the moment, and looking upon the old waiter simply as a friend, he held out his hand.

What would his ancestors have said could they have seen him? This, their last descendant, who on the night on which he was bound to observe the family tradition, constituted by themselves and handed down for centuries, escaped from Bicheterre, like a malefactor with a policeman at his heels.

Ernest hesitated, greatly confused, and not daring to accept the legacy, was only induced to do so through the insistence of Arthur.

"Come! Come! my good friend" said Arthur, with a liberal frankness which did not in any way detract from his dignity, "we all descend from our first parents, if our catechism teaches us correctly.

"Besides, in these times, the true superiority of the man lies here!...." and he laid his hand on his heart."

"Ernest," continued Arthur, "you know what is going to happen to me?"

"Alas! Sir!"



"You have been told? It is to be with pistols!"

"I knew it, even before it was fully arranged. We are always well informed of the movements of our customers."

"In this case, Ernest, you will understand, I am really not in a state to order the supper for to-night. Will you oblige me, and take complete charge of it?"

"Ah! You are joking sir?" quickly replied the waiter. "You surely did not think I could fail you, sir?"

"Not for a moment, Ernest."

"I have earned my reward," replied the other. "How many are invited for to-night?"

"Eighteen, myself included."

Ernest took a pencil and paper from his pocket, and, although still agitated, made an effort to compose himself.

Then in an altered tone, and smothering a sob—the sob of a tender-hearted man—he said:

"I think that, under the circumstances, this will do...."



"Compose yourself, Ernest, and let us consider it calmly."

More and more touched, Arthur added mentally:

"He conducted himself pretty fairly, but he exasperated me, with his rather premature grief, which reminds me too forcibly of my impending fate. But it is, I suppose, from being so soft-hearted, and, on the whole, he does very well."

"There!" said Ernest, in a lugubrious tone. "Eighteen doz....Ostend; exclusively from Ostend!"

"Why exclusively? The Americans are not bad."

"Certainly not, sir; but they have a green shade, which would appear too gay under the terrible....."

"Ah! you think, Ernest, that the green shade?....."

"While the Ostend," continued the waiter, "is gray, retiring!....."

"Very good!" said Arthur, anxious to cut him short, "That will do for the Ostends!"



“Afterwards! Alas, sir, dab with mint sauce, simply.”

“Yes!”

“As an entrée, followed by *hors d'ouvres*,—duck, with olives....Spanish olives; darker tint.”

“Yes; and then?”

“And then?...Pheasant!” articulated Ernest, in a broken-hearted tone. “One humble pheasant supported by quails, simply on account of the ladies, sir,—supported by quails!”

He heaved a deep sigh.

“Then,” continued he, with despair in his voice, “asparagus, vanilla ice and coffee, dessert, grapes with vine leaves, Majorca figs, pine-apples from Pointre-à-Pitre, Cuban almonds...”

“Very well,” interrupted Arthur, who began to weary, in spite of himself, of the premature lamentations of this “friend.” “And for wine?”

“Chateau Lafitte!”

“Very well! Lafitte, and.....champagne. That will do.”

“Champagne!” exclaimed Ernest scandalized. “No, sir, no!”

“No? For what reason?”



"The circumstances!"

"Ah! yes. But what can we have instead?"

Ernest made a fearful grimace in an effort to swallow his tears, and in a voice which betrayed his emotion, he at last succeeded in saying:

"You can have some *vin grave*, sir, some *vin grave*!!!

Arthur understood, and again held out his hand.

"Thank you, Ernest," said he, feeling impatient, but nevertheless grateful.

"You know you can rely upon me, sir," replied the waiter, feeling more and more highly honored.

"Always, Ernest. And without wishing to flatter you, if my seconds had been as devoted as you, if....."

"Hush!" said the other, looking severe. "Your seconds, sir! I would not allow myself to say anything, but....."

"Have they been?....."

"Ah! Monsieur!....."

"Come, come, it won't go any farther."

"Ah, sir! They are very much to blame!"



"You think as I do, my good God! I do not wish to say anything, either, but in choosing pistols they have simply sent me to be butchered. Do you see, Ernest?"

"It is very evident, sir."

"You agree with me, then?"

"There is not a doubt of it! Yet....."

"Yet!" replied Arthur, quickly. "Yet what?" It won't go any further. Speak frankly, my good fellow."

"Yet, don't be uneasy about it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Ernest, "that they will hear more about this duel."

"You think so?"

"Think so? I wager a hundred francs that they will be put in prison!...."

"Ah!" said Arthur, forgetting himself for a moment, "they deserve it."

The conversation had to drop. Voices were heard in the corridor asking for number sixteen.

These were the first arrivals, accompanied by the Baron and his wife.

The others, with the Prince Swenska, were



not long in following, and soon their party was complete.

Arthur was enchanted to see them, and showed his pleasure by the joyful cordiality of his reception, all the more extraordinary, on account of what Ernest called the "circumstances."

They drank freely, swallowing the Lafitte as if it were milk, and in spite of the *menu*, so carefully inscribed for each, they demanded a host of things which were not mentioned, and champagne without ceasing.

Arthur had decided on the line of conduct he would adopt: To the devil with melancholly! He drank like a fish, recounted questionable stories in very plain language, and took the fourth part in "La Mère Gaudichon."

The ladies were enchanted with him, leaving their places to whisper little confidences in his ear, struggling with each other for the place nearest him, and even insinuating themselves on his knees.

The hours passed, and the poor devil forgot everything; his duel, with all its consequences,



his wife, the Count, and his seconds; even Ernest!

Suddenly, a hand was placed on his shoulder. He turned his head and saw the Baron, carefully buttoned up to his chin, not unlike a supernumary who has to dissimulate the absence of all linen.

"Time is up, my dear Arthur" said he to him in a hushed voice.

"Time for what?"

"To go over there."

"Where?"

The Baron put on a severe look."

"Have you forgotten what honor demands of you, my friend?" asked he.

A bucket of cold water thrown on a man in the act of enjoying a good romp, could not have had a more decided effect than the sound of this word "honor" on the mind of Arthur.

"All right" said he proudly. "Let us leave."

He got up rapidly, and buttoned himself up even more closely than his second. But once on his feet, he seemed to see thirty-six candles before him, and if he had not clung to the



table for support, would certainly have gone head foremost against the wall.

"It is only the heat" said he, recovering himself almost immediately, and trying to overcome the feeling of giddiness. "It is so awfully hot here. Let us get out. The fresh air will revive me."

Once outside, he could not remember how he had managed to leave "number sixteen" and get down stairs. Had he paid the bill? He had even forgotten to ask for it. When he quite recovered possession of his senses, he found himself in the corner of a cab, in front of two lugubriously silent figures in black.

The windows of the cab were lowered, and a rush of cold, damp air came full on his face, rousing him from the semi-torpid condition into which he had sunk, while in a vague way the thought passed through his mind:

"I shall certainly catch cold."

Catch cold! well, what did it matter. With every turn of the wheel was he not approaching another danger?

The houses, the jets of gas, the few individuals who were out at that early hour looked



like guant phantoms as they hurried along the road. Everything seemed to pass with a bewildering rapidity. He asked himself if the horse was a phantom, also.

They passed the barrier, then the Faubourgs, and at last came upon a road lined on each side by trees; some of them large and shady, others dwarfed and misshapen. A little further on a slight break appeared on the distant horizon. The air was heavy with a thick mist, and a disagreeable odor of partially decomposed vegetables pervaded the air. Silence reigned supreme.

Where were they?

He could not tell. To judge by the length of the drive he might have been in Normandy, or in some unexplored country.

Gradually daylight appeared; not far off he saw a wood. That must be the place, he thought. He tried to rouse himself, feeling that now, more than ever, it depended upon him to prove himself worthy of the name he bore.

But the Lafitte had something to say to this; his ideas came by fits and starts. A hundred



confused fancies surged through his brain, and his will was powerless to aid him in following up any continuous line of thought.

When at last they arrived at their destination, the tall poplars by which they were surrounded conveyed to him so disagreeably the impression of being enclosed in a gigantic vault, that the few coherent ideas, still remaining, vanished into thin air.

He gave up all hope of being able to struggle against this nightmarish oppression, to see, or to comprehend. He simply steadied his nerves sufficiently to preserve an imperturbable and firm exterior, and resigned himself to his unhappy doom.

"The devil!" said he.

In fact, he had only one desire, namely: That everything should be ended, and that quickly.

The cab had stopped in the thickest part of the wood. They descended, and he was conducted by his seconds through a small pathway, which they were obliged to follow in Indian file, Arthur in the middle, following the Baron, who had a box in his hand.



They arrived at the clearing, walled in on one side, at the corner of which stood a sort of summer-house, shaded by some surrounding vine trees. There was a small door in the wall, over which were inscribed:

“THE RENDEZVOUS OF GOOD FRIENDS.”

Pure Wines.

Giblet stew, Fresh eggs, Fried fish.

Entrance from the Road.

The sign of this little tavern increased Arthur's bewilderment, so little does it take, under some circumstances, to upset a man's equanimity. It seemed to him an almost unnecessary act of cruelty, to plant before the eyes of men, prepared to kill each other, such a sign as “The rendezvous of good friends.” It seemed singular to him that his seconds should choose such a place, and Ernest's remark was forcibly recalled to him:

“I wager a hundred francs they will be put in prison.”

Glancing to one side, he fancied he distinguished, behind one of the trees, something white, near which two forms were actively en-



gaged. These two figures were also clothed in white.

Arthur, curious to know what they were about, took some steps in their direction, and thought he perceived a picture which rooted him to the ground, and gave him a cold shiver from head to foot.

Yes, this must be an optical delusion, a freak of fancy, the influence of that cursed "Lafitte" Was it possible that what he saw was really there? A table covered with a napkin, on which was a case of surgical instruments--saws, pincers, scalpels, trocars, etc., with bands of linen and a bundle of lint.

And busy in preparing and arranging all this, and in trying the edges of the various instruments were two men, the surgeon and his assistant, with sleeves rolled up to the elbow, adorned with the orthodox apron, of which the huge pockets were stuffed with everything calculated to make one's blood run cold.

Let him think. Were all these precautions usual in affairs of this kind? Arthur had never heard of it before.



He became more and more bewildered, and as he stood there, breathless, stupefied, literally stunned, he heard some one call out his name.

The little door in the wall opened, and his adversary stepped forward accompanied by two cut-throats, of the most formidable appearance.

The four seconds drew to one side and consulted together in a low voice as to whether Arthur was to be placed in full face, or profile.

This was at all events the impression he received as he followed their movements.

He had arrived at that point of impatience, experienced in desperate cases, when one has made up their mind to submit to the inevitable. All these delays exasperated him and he wished to heaven they would make haste. At last the seconds seemed to agree. Two occupied themselves in loading the pistols, while the others measured the ground.

After which they placed the combatants. When Arthur felt himself holding a huge machine, three times the weight of the pistols he



had practiced with the day before, the abomination of the position in which he was placed was completely unveiled to his eyes. His seconds, having given him their last directions, as to the manner in which he must bear himself in order to conform to a so-called "code of honor," the articles of which no one had ever seen, he said to himself, by way of a final confession:

"Good God, above! what a fool I have made of myself! That reading those silly novels made me despise the tranquil happiness prepared for me, is nothing. That through the most sublime idiocy, I preferred a plastered-up coquette, a hundred times more designing than any Jesuit, let even that pass. But that under a pretext of 'honor' I have consented to plant myself here, as a target before this blood-thirsty old buccaneer, to whom one would not lend a *louis* with any hope of ever seeing it again, an adventurer who has followed every trade; half Greek, half cheat, a cross between a bully and a highwayman—if not on the high road, at least on the Pampas—not for myself, but for 'honor,' I place myself before the pis-



tol of a fellow who plays with it as easily as he cuts a pack of cards, while this ponderous weapon in my hands is as useless as a tooth-pick. It is truly the height of absurdity.

His reflections were cut short.

A blinding flash, a loud report which reverberated through his brain, a mist before his eyes, was followed, during the millionth part of a second, by a vision which crossed his brain.

It was an infernal phantasmagoria:

Above the wall, heads appeared, forming a group in the foliage-clad summer-house. First the head of Inez, then Anatole's, close to that of Aglaé, the two Hungarians of the boarding-house on the banks of the Leman, who appeared on very friendly terms with the Baroness; Fulgence, the flower-girl, was there also; all those, in fact, whom he had known since his arrival in Paris, whom he had met during his varied experience of "High Life." But there was an unnatural expression in their faces, a look of deviltry, and pointing their fingers at him, they seemed convulsed with laughter. And above them, like Jupiter seated on Olympus, appeared a man still youthful in



appearance, with curling locks, and flowing golden beard, and hands with exquisitely tapering fingers.

Was he a living representation, this latter one? The fact admitted of no doubt. It seemed rather a portrait in copper-plate, printed in rose-colored ink. Only the half figure was visible, a frame ornamented with Arabian figures, formed a square all around, and on one side floated a paper, on which was inscribed two words, forming a name.

Arthur blinked his eyes and read:

“Arsène Houssaye!”

It was too much. He extended his arms, his knees gave way, and experiencing at the same moment a feeling of agony in his head, he gave a loud cry!....



## CHAPTER IX.

### CONCLUSION.

Allowing that the reader may be one of those benighted beings who, in their overweening conceit, refuse to believe all that is preached by Monsieur le Curé, yet you know,—and like myself are pretty certain—that after death the immaterial part of our being lives in the full exercise of its faculties.

Arthur had never doubted this, and, knowing that he had departed this life, he was astonished on finding himself assailed by certain bodily sensations, notably, a racking headache.

A feeling of very natural curiosity impelled him to ask where he was? In Hades, Purgatory, or Paradise? In Limbo, more likely; or, at least, in an ante-chamber leading to one of the aforementioned places.

The light was uncertain; one would imagine



an insufficient luminary struggling against the first dawn of day. After a few moments, the eyes of Arthur's soul became more accustomed to the surrounding gloom, he was able to see the other half of himself.

He was extended at full length on the ground, his shoulders and head excepted, which rested upon something firm, but soft, something also which imparted a feeling of warmth, and from which he could distinctly feel a regular throbbing, accompanied by a dull, indistinct sound, a sort of toc-toc cadence, repeating itself about eighty times to the minute.

Arthur soon discovered that there was animation in this object so firm and soft. The toc-toc came from a perfectly sound heart, and came from a being analogous to the human species. For in fact it was on the knee of this being, that the head and shoulders of Arthur's body rested, and against its breast that his head was supported. In addition, this being of the other world had arms and hands—a proof of which being, that it held in one hand a sort of cup, containing a smoking liquid,



which it blew upon softly, tasting it from time to time, conveying the impression that some of it was to be insinuated between the lips of what had once been Arthur.

“This must be my Guardian Angel,” reflected the soul of the latter. Indeed, it was all clad in white, with long folds hanging down on either side. “But there are no wings! Why am I made to take this mysterious preparation?”

All this takes a long time to write,—above all when, doubtful of the true sense of a word, one is obliged to have recourse to the dictionary, to learn the decision of the Academy,—longer to write than to take place.

And, in fact, between Arthur’s cry and his last query on the subject of the mysterious drink, scarcely three minutes had elapsed.

He had not time to answer himself, for suddenly a formidable noise terrified him. It was like an avalanche, worse still, a deafening clatter of Auvergnat shoes across a staircase, accompanied by lamentations and loud calls, enough to make one fear that the devil himself had come to claim his prey.



“It is but just!” thought their prey—that is, the soul of Arthur. “I had completely forgotten Extreme Unction, upon my word, I’m a pretty sort of fellow; I shall have to toast for this to the end of time!”

A blinding light invaded the space, and the unfortunate victim could think of nothing but fire. A chilling silence followed, broken by whisperings, like the sounds of bats’ wings.

All communications with his earthly organs were not altogether at an end: he seemed to experience an inward sensation of comfortable warmth, and he was conscious of something strange coming in contact with his lips.

Upon which he was better able to distinguish surrounding objects. He saw singular looking personages, with extraordinary head gear, and muffled up in strange garments, holding in their hands lighted torches, which in any other place one would have sworn were candles.

He gazed upon them anxiously, and one voice, altogether devoid of anything strident, and in no way recalling the rumbling of thunder, pronounced these magic words:



“Well, my cousin, do you not feel a little better now?”

Magical, indeed, was the effect of these simple words; for scarcely were they uttered, when all the fantastic world in which Arthur's spirit had been struggling, suddenly vanished.

The supposed Guardian Angel was Charlotte, his cousin Charlotte.

The apparitions so quaintly attired, were the Vidame of Bicheterre, the Canoness Stéphanie, with some other relations and friends of the family.

Alarmed at the loud cry of the young man, they had all hurried into their dressing gowns and slippers, frightened and anxious, and now remained looking on with benevolent and tender hearted sympathy at the care and attention lavished on him so skillfully, by his future wife, since the moment, when rolling off the sofa, he had fallen with his head against the foot of the table.

But his future wife? How could that be?

And Inez, and the Count d'Aldaïa, the Baron, the Prince, Geneva, the Rigi-Külm, the



Hungarians, Ernest, the good but lugubrious Ernest, the races, the duel?....

It was all a painful dream, the consequences of too heavy a supper, and a too generous libation at the shrine of the rosy God—very natural for a young man accustomed to lead a life almost ascetic in its simplicity.

Ah, what a sigh of thankful relief he gave.

Yet, could it be true, that all he had thought lost and sacrificed, was intact, and still remained within his reach: the loving tenderness of his beautiful little Charlotte—which recalled to him the Aglaè of his nightmare—this easy quiet life, so attractive in its simplicity, in this old Chateau, full of reminiscences of his childhood?

He was assured of this a few moments later.

The tenants and vassals, who, the evening before, had gone away in a staggering condition, returned at sunrise freshly shaved and arrayed in holiday attire, with bouquets and wedding favors pinned on their coats, singing in a clear voice and with heartfelt sincerity as they marched up to the chateau:



“Proclaim the tidings far and wide!  
For Fandasec doth take a bride.  
The earth, the sea, the birds, the air  
Give forth the fortune of Bicheterre;  
For henceforth, till their days are done,  
The houses twain shall be as one.”

Thereupon the young man forgot the disagreeable impressions which had so agitated him. The care bestowed upon him, by the lovely little Charlotte, had been so efficacious, that he no longer suffered from the blow he had received in falling, and embracing them all, commencing with her, he begged them to delay no longer in preparing for the nuptial ceremony.

At ten o'clock the mayor pronounced the formula, and at midday the Curé pronounced his benediction on their union.

When Arthur saw preparations in progress for another sumptuous feast, and remembering his experience of the previous evening, he felt considerable anxiety in case he should fall into the same state of over-excitement, but he was on his guard, simply touching with his lips the innumerable glasses of wine offered to him, and when, on the following day they



enquired after his health, he replied, in all sincerity:

“I have passed a much better night.”

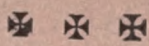
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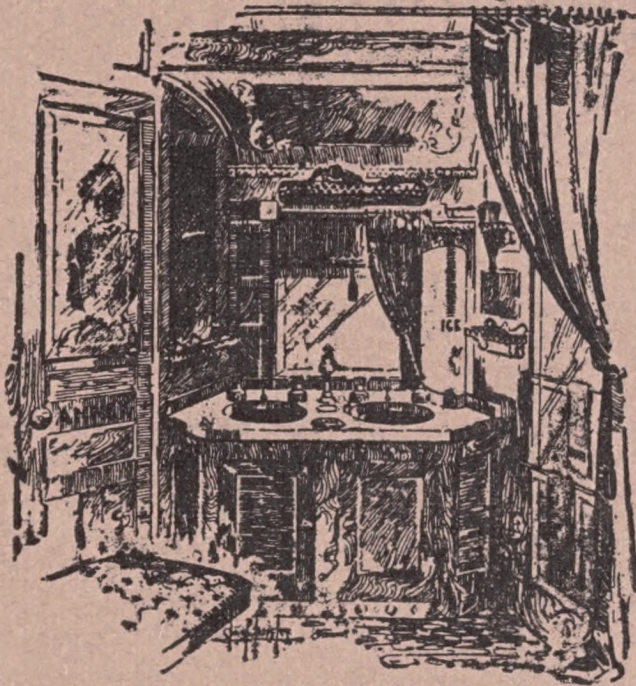
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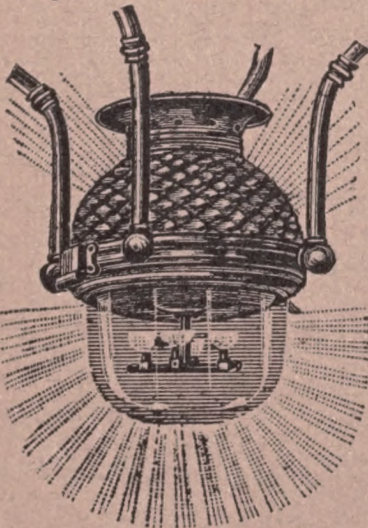
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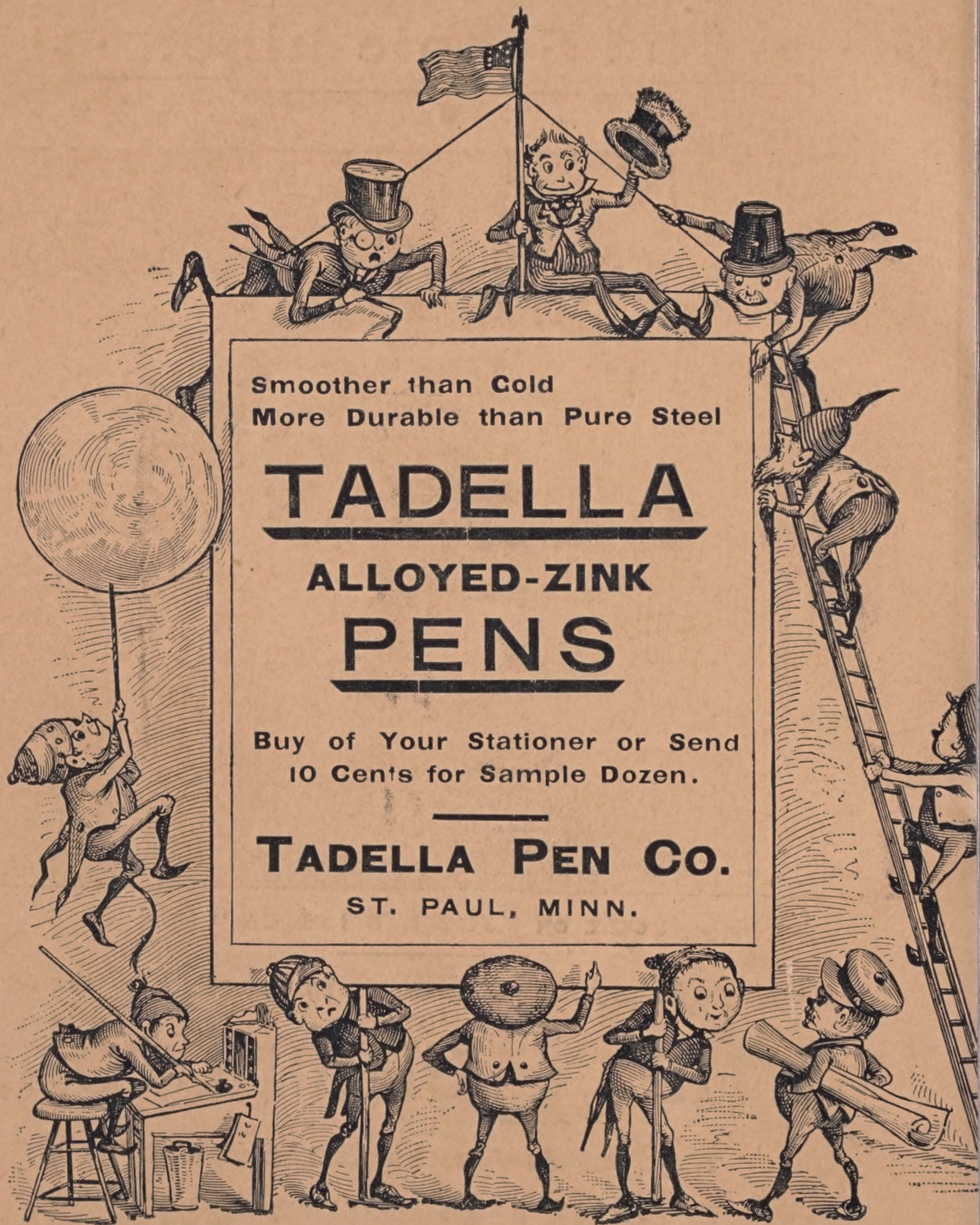
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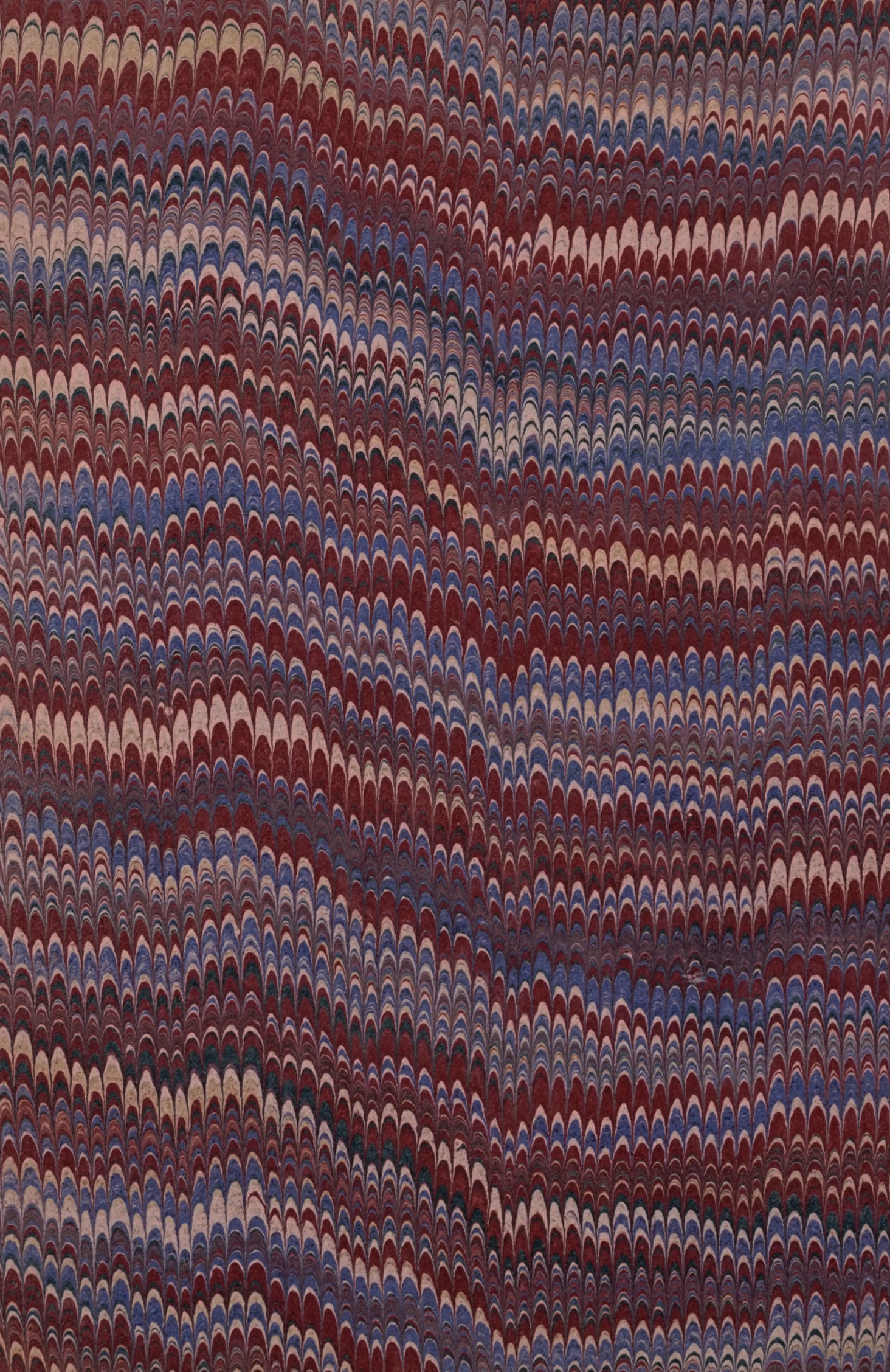




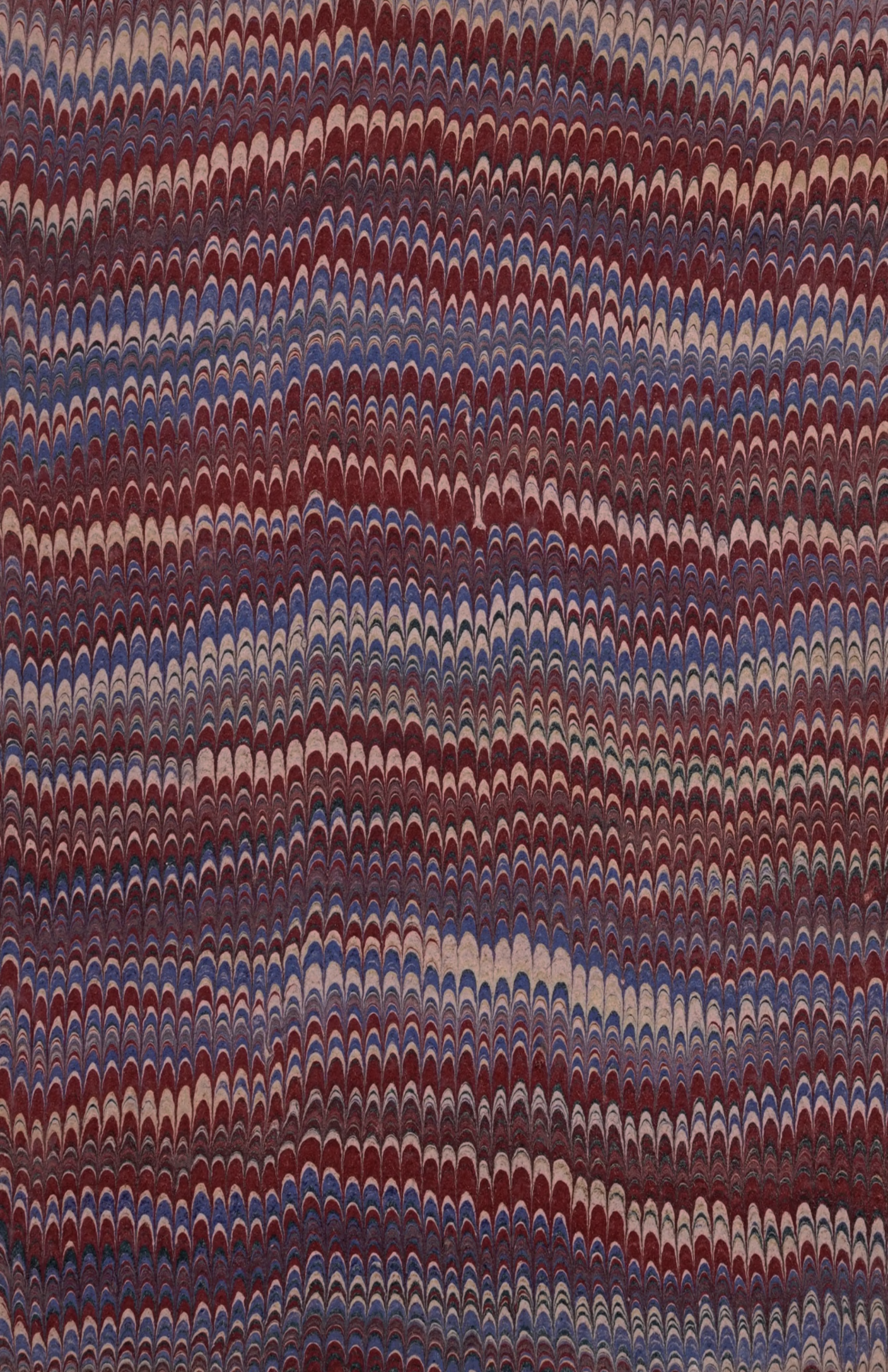














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